

The Dark Side of the Reformation: A Bloody and Bitter Legacy

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The Protestant Reformation was one of the most monumental and significant events in Western history. As the historian Rudolph Heinze writes, “The changes that occurred were so radical that a medieval Rip van Winkle who went to sleep in 1350 and woke up in 1650 would not recognize the world as the same one in which he was born.” Protestant Christians tend to look back at the 16th century as a kind of Golden Age in church history in which heroic figures such as Martin Luther, William Tyndale, John Calvin, and Menno Simons emerged to challenge the Roman Catholic Church’s dominance over the religious, social and cultural life of Europe. Certainly, the Reformation was a great watershed event, and there is much about it that is cause for celebration. For the first time in over a thousand years, Europeans had an alternative to the imperial Roman Catholic Church. Not only was the Reformation movement a major grassroots reaction to corruption in the Church, but it also offered an incisive critique of many apostate doctrines and practices of Roman Catholicism by restoring the centrality of the Bible as the source of authority for doctrinal and ecclesiastical orthodoxy. As a result, within twenty years after Luther drafted his Ninety-Five Thesis, the Bible was available to most Europeans in the vernacular.

However, there was another, darker side of the Reformation era that is often overlooked. The century-and-a-quarter between 1525-1650 was an exceedingly turbulent period in Europe and Britain as numerous bloody and destructive wars raged between Catholics and Protestants – all fought, of course, in the name of the Prince of Peace. For while the Reformation sparked a great deal of intense religious zeal, it also ignited a firestorm of religious bigotry and persecution that generated an unprecedented degree of social and political chaos that shattered the fragile unity of European civilization. Along with positive developments such as the breakup of the Roman Catholic religious monopoly, the emergence of fresh new religious movements that brought spiritual renewal to millions, the reevaluation of antiquated political dogmas such as “royal absolutism” and the “divine right of kings,” and the eventual acceptance of religious tolerance, the excesses of the Reformation inadvertently produced a secular reaction that contributed to the rise of religious skepticism and humanistic rationalism throughout Europe and Britain.

PART 1: PRELUDE TO THE REFORMATION

THE DARK SIDE OF CHURCH HISTORY

The Emergence of Christendom. For more than eleven hundred years, medieval Christendom was held together by a fragile (and sometimes contentious) alliance of church and state – a system known as **Christian sacralism**. In most instances the state dominated the church (after all, the state had the armed strength to impose its will), although occasionally the power relationship might be reversed temporarily under a particularly strong and influential pope or a local archbishop. In such a culture everyone was at least a nominal Catholic, with the exception of Jews and the Muslims in Spain. As the self-proclaimed “Holy Mother Church” and the repository of salvation, the Church defined its mission on earth as not only shepherding God’s flock through the vicissitudes of life, but also preserving and protecting the One True Faith from heretics, schismatics and apostates who threatened to pervert its purity and fracture its unity. In

keeping with the mentality of the times, the Church regarded religious tolerance as a vice rather than a virtue. Therefore, it did not hesitate to enforce its authority through intimidation and coercion, even employing the power of the state when necessary. All of this was rationalized as necessary for two reasons: social and cultural cohesion depended upon a unified belief system, and (most important) the eternal souls of men and women were at stake.

Therefore, the Church took a hard stand against any challenges to its authority. In fact, this practice began once the persecution of Christians ended with the ascent of **Constantine “the Great”** (r. 312-37) to the imperial throne early in the 4th century. With the



Constantine

issuance of the **Edict of Milan** in 313, Christians were now free to practice their faith unmolested by their pagan nemeses. Subsequently, due to the patronage of the emperor, a dramatic shift took place in terms of the Church’s relationship to society, culture, and the state. A generation after Constantine, the emperor

Theodosius I (r. 379-95) issued the **Edict of Thessalonika** establishing Catholic (or Nicene) Christianity as the official civil religion of the empire – a turn of events that was highly ironic. For nearly 300 years Christians had been the victims of unjust discrimination and sadistic persecution. Now, within a single generation, the Church had gained not only religious liberty but religious dominance to the point that it turned the tables on the pagans. By the time of the Byzantine emperor **Justinian I** (r. 527-65), all religions, cults and sects other than Christianity were outlawed, and in 530 he even issued a rescript requiring all his subjects to submit to baptism, accompanied by the following threat:

Should they disobey, let them know that they will be excluded from the state and will no longer have any rights of possession, neither goods nor property; stripped of everything, they will be reduced to penury, without prejudice to the appropriate punishments that will be imposed on them.

For mainstream Catholic Christians, all of this was cause for celebration. No longer a pagan state and society, Rome had been spiritually transformed into “Christendom” – the Kingdom of Christ.

DEALING WITH DISSIDENTS

Purifying the Faith. But the Church was not content to persecute only pagans. Non-Catholic dissidents were also subject to suppression. In 395 the proconsul of Asia inquired of the emperor **Arcadius** (r. 395-408) a clarification regarding the definition of heresy. In response, the emperor wrote...

Those persons who may be discovered to deviate, even in a minor point of doctrine, from the tenets and paths of the Catholic religion are included within the designation of heretics and must be subject to the sanctions which have been issued against them.

Beginning with Constantine’s crackdown on the **Donatists** and **Arians** in the 320s and continuing through the 4th and 5th centuries with the suppression of groups such as the **Pelagians**, **Priscillianists**, **Nestorians**, and **Monophysites**, the Catholic Church, working in tandem with the Roman imperial state, moved aggressively to eliminate all rivals. While both the Arians and Monophysites certainly held to a non-orthodox (i.e., non-biblical) Christology and the Pelagians propagated some questionable doctrines, other groups such as the Donatists, Priscillians and Nestorians appear to have been in many ways more authentically Christian than the mainstream Catholic Church itself. Nevertheless, their refusal to submit to the authority of Rome was condemned as disloyal to the historic Christian faith, so they were summarily declared not only illegitimate but illegal.

Reformers and Restorationists. This pattern of suppression of non-Catholic dissident groups continued for the next thousand years. Periodically, various individuals and groups surfaced with a common theme: the Roman Catholic Church is doctrinally and functionally corrupt. Two solutions were proposed to address these problems: some dissidents advocated internal reforms to rectify the worst abuses, while others adopted a more radical restorationist position – i.e., that the only alternative for true Christians was to leave Catholicism altogether and return to the pure beliefs and practices of the early church as set forth in the New Testament. Depending upon specific circumstances, Catholic authorities sometimes tolerated or even cooperated with some of the reformers, while the more radical restorationists were always marked for persecution if not outright extermination.

Medieval Catholicism was not as monolithic as is often supposed. A vibrant intellectual culture centered around some of the more scholastic-oriented monasteries and cathedral schools, and the proliferation of universities in the 12th and 13th centuries promoted vigorous debates on everything

from philosophy, theology and ecclesiology to the proper relationship between church and state. Brilliant intellectuals such as **Anselm** (1034-1109), **Roger Bacon** (1220-92), **John of Paris** (1250-1306), **Dante Alighieri** (1265-1321), **Marsilius of Padua** (c. 1275-1342), **John Duns Scotus** (1266-1308), **William of Occam** (1280-1349), and many others challenged conventional thinking and even some Church dogmas on a variety of issues, while others were unsparing in their condemnation of ecclesiastical corruption. For example, **Robert Grosseteste** (1168-1253), a renowned scholar, philosopher, theologian, scientist, and bishop of Lincoln in England, deposed many abbots and priests for incompetence and/or corruption. Visiting Rome in 1250, he charged that the papal court was the source of most of the evils in the Church, and on several occasions he confronted Pope Innocent IV, even calling him an “antichrist” who would be damned to hell for his sins.

In addition, some of the most influential critics of the Church included mystics such as **Richard Rolle** (1095-1149), **Hildegard of Bingen** (1098-1179), **Jacques de Vitry** (c. 1165-1240), **John Tauler** (1300-61), **Margaret Kempe** (1373-1433), and groups such as the German-based **Friends of God** and **Gerard Goote’s Brethren of the Common Life**. Most notable of all the mystic reformers was **Francis of Assisi** (1182-1226), one of the preeminent figures in all of church history. Another respected spiritual leader, **Bridget of Sweden** (1303-73), compared the corrupt and profligate Pope Clement VI to Lucifer, Pontius Pilate and Judas Iscariot – an opinion also shared by **Catherine of Siena** (1347-80), who referred to Clement VI as the devil incarnate.

Although some of these critics of the Church and the papacy were subjected to intense scrutiny, even someone who flirted with outright heresy such as the philosopher/theologian **Peter Abelard** (1079-1142)

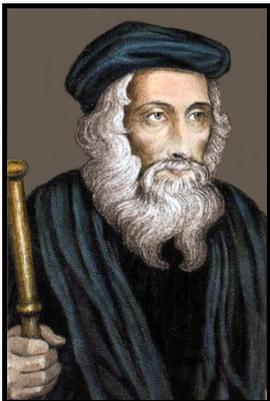
managed to keep, if not his academic position, at least his head. But there was one thing all these reformers had in common: all professed loyalty (at least, publicly) to the “Mother Church”

This was likewise true for **John Wycliffe** (1328-84), the great “Morning Star of the Reformation,” although he was also a vociferous critic of many Catholic doctrines and practices. Through his study of

the Bible, Wycliffe concluded that the Church taught gross errors. He rejected the authority of the pope and taught what later Reformers such as Luther would term *sola scriptura*, including justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. He also repudiated transubstantiation, sacramentalism, prayers for the dead, the worship of saints and relics, the selling of indulgences, and other non-biblical teachings of the Church. In addition, he condemned the wealth and worldliness of the Church and clergy. Wycliffe was charged with heresy on several occasions, and he only avoided being executed as a martyr due to his status as a preeminent scholar, in addition to the political circumstances and considerations in England at the time. But nonetheless, forty years after his death the pope ordered his remains to be exhumed, burned at the stake, and thrown into the River Swift.

Unfortunately, not all critics of the Church were as fortunate as Wycliffe. **Arnold of Brescia**, a protégé of Peter Abelard and a bold critic of papal and ecclesiastical corruption, was condemned as a heretic and hanged on orders of the pope in 1155, after which his corpse was burned and the ashes thrown into the Tiber to prevent his followers from venerating his grave site. In 1310 **Marguerite Porete** was arrested for spreading heresy “among simple people” for teaching that truly spiritual Christians do not need the sacraments or official Church approval for what they believe and how they worship. Marguerite was subjected to intense interrogation, and when she refused to recant she was summarily burned at the stake.

The most famous of the medieval-era dissident martyrs was the great Czech reformer, **Jan Hus** (John Huss, 1368-1415). Like Wycliffe, Hus was also a renowned scholar, but the political situation in Eastern Europe was considerably more volatile than in Wycliffe’s England. Hus decried the corruption in the Church and railed against doctrines such as papal infallibility and the selling of indulgences, but his eventual downfall came more from his involvement in the political disputes of his day. A passionate patriot, he advocated separation from the Holy Roman Empire, and eventually he lost the protection of the king of Bohemia. Seizing the opportunity, his opponents accused him of being “the most dangerous heretic” since the time of Christ – “other than Wycliffe” – and he was excommunicated from the Church. Although promised protection by the authorities at the Council of Constance in 1414, he was promptly arrested, thrown into a dungeon, and burned at the stake in June of 1415. A year later, his one-time mentor, **Jerome of**



John Wycliffe

Prague (1378-1416), was also burned alive as a heretic.

[Post-scripts: Prior to his execution, Hus reportedly prophesied, “You may roast this goose (‘Hus’ means ‘goose’ in Czech), but a hundred years from now a swan will arise whose singing you will not be able to silence.” Almost exactly a century later, Martin Luther sparked the protest movement that



Jan Hus at the stake

became the Protestant Reformation.

In December 1999, nearly 600 years after Hus’s death, Pope John Paul II praised the martyr’s “moral courage in the face of adversity and death” and apologized for the “cruel death” that the Roman Catholic Church inflicted on him.]

In light of the cruel treatment of Wycliffe, Hus, and other courageous voices of protest inside the Church, one can imagine what the Church’s response was toward those who called for total separation from it. Almost without exception, such individuals and groups were harassed and persecuted out of existence, although occasionally some managed to survive for generations. It is hard to know exactly what some of these dissidents believed and practiced because they were often slandered by their Catholic opponents, but it is reasonable to assume that some were true Christians while others, perhaps lacking access to the Bible, practiced aberrant forms of the faith.

From early medieval times to the outbreak of the Reformation, many dissidents and non-conformist groups came and went. Some, such as the **Paulicans**, the **Bogomils**, and the **Albigenses** (or **Cathars**), appear to have held some heretical views. Others, including **Peter de Bruy’s Petrobrusians**, **Henry of Lausanne’s Henricians**, Wycliffe’s followers, the **Lollards**, and **Peter Valdes’ Waldensians** were generally orthodox. But with the proliferation of such groups, and regardless of their doctrinal merits or deficiencies, all were targeted for annihilation.

THE INQUISITIONS

The “Holy Office.” A coordinated effort to eliminate dissidents began in 1163 at the **Council of Tours** when **Pope Alexander III** called on secular rulers to root out heresies within their domains. Twenty years later his successor, **Pope Lucius III**, instructed bishops to actively pursue heretics and turn them over to civil authorities. Then in 1231 **Pope Gregory IX** officially launched the Inquisition when he established the “Holy Office” to prosecute heretics. Under the new guidelines, the Church was granted exclusive jurisdiction over heresy trials as inquisitors reported directly to the pope and were not accountable to local Church or civil officials. In response to the recalcitrance of many non-conformists, in 1252 **Pope Innocent IV** expanded the interrogation procedures by authorizing the use of torture against those who were accused. Some of the Church’s greatest scholars, including the renowned **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-74), heartily endorsed the goals and methods of the Inquisition. According to Thomas, “Heresy is a sin which merits not only excommunication but also death.”

Anti-Heresy Crusades. In 1205 **Pope Innocent III** called for a crusade against Albigenses, Waldensians and other dissidents. Over the next several years tens of thousands were killed. In 1209 a Catholic army took the Albigensian town of Beziers in southern France, a campaign that resulted in the massacre of the entire population including women and children. Some 7,000 were slaughtered inside a church building where they had taken refuge, and as the crusaders rampaged through the streets one soldier reminded the papal legate that many Catholics also lived in Beziers, to which he received the response: “Kill them all – God will know his own.”

Despite the mass slaughter of dissidents, the Waldensian movement refused to capitulate. In the early 1300s the number of Waldensian churches began to grow rapidly until finally, in 1348, **Emperor Charles IV** (r. 1346-78) of the Holy Roman Empire* commissioned the Inquisition to aggressively route out Waldensians and anyone else still outside the authority

* The “Holy Roman Empire,” which dates from the crowning of Charlemagne in 800, is one of the great misnomers in history: It was not Roman, nor was it really an empire, and it certainly wasn’t holy. In reality, it was an amalgamation of more than 300 political entities. While the emperor ruled directly over the Archduchy of Austria and the kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary, other areas including Bavaria, Savoy, Brandenburg, Hesse, and various free cities and other principalities functioned as semi-independent states.

of the Church of Rome. Thousands were coerced into converting to Catholicism, while many others were tortured and burned at the stake. The campaign took several decades, but by the end of the 14th century the Waldensians and most other non-conformist groups had been eradicated.

[Post-scripts: To counter the influence of “heretics” who used the Bible to support their teachings, in 1229 the **Council of Toulouse** outlawed the translation of the Bible into the vernacular and authorized only Roman Catholic clergymen to read and teach the Bible. Later, in the midst of the Reformation, the **Council of Trent** (1545, 1563) confirmed these decrees and declared the Latin Vulgate to be the only officially-approved version of the Bible.

In 2015 Pope Francis apologized for the Roman Catholic Church’s persecution of the Waldensians, referring to their movement as Europe’s “oldest evangelical church.”]

The Spanish Inquisition. In 1478 **King Ferdinand II of Aragon** and **Queen Isabella of Castile** launched a second phase of the Inquisition when they coerced Pope Sixtus IV into granting them exclusive jurisdiction over the enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy in their kingdom. Historically, the Spanish Inquisition is particularly notorious for three reasons: It occurred at the dawn of the modern age; it was directed primarily at Jews; and the torture methods used by inquisitors were especially sadistic and effective.

In the 1480s Ferdinand and Isabella united Spain as a Catholic nation, and in 1492 they completed the *Reconquista* by conquering the last Moorish (Muslim) stronghold of Granada. With the Muslims soundly defeated, the king and queen turned their attention to cleansing Spain of all Jews and heretics. At first, ghettos were established in cities, towns and villages where Jews were mandated to live, which resulted in many Jews becoming *conversos* to avoid the new restrictions. However, many of these “conversions” were merely a matter of self-preservation, so in March 1492, at the urging of the Inquisitor General **Tomas de Torquemada**, the monarchs signed the **Alhambra Decree** banishing all Jews from Spain who refused to be baptized as Christians. Among other things, the Decree accused Jews of trying to “subvert the holy Catholic faith” by drawing “faithful Christians away from their beliefs.” Any Jews who refused to convert to Catholicism or leave the kingdom were subject to execution.

Historians disagree regarding the extent and the severity of the Spanish Inquisition. Some believe the numbers of people arrested, interrogated, tortured and executed were grossly exaggerated – mostly by Protestant historians eager to discredit the Catholic purge. Nonetheless, even by the most conservative estimates, it was an extraordinarily bloody time in Spanish history. Over a 250-year period, perhaps 150,000 were arrested and interrogated, with some 3-5,000 being executed. Most of the victims were Jews between the years 1480-1530, and during Torquemada’s 15 years as Inquisitor General perhaps as many as 2,000 were burned at the stake.

The impact of the Inquisition on Spanish Protestants was minimal due to the fact that there were never many Protestant converts in Spain. While it is true that some victims of the Inquisition were accused of being “Lutherans” or “Protestants,” in reality many of these were simply eccentric mystics, humanists or secularists. Beginning in 1558 a few small congregations of Protestants were discovered, and over the next 3 years about 100 men and women were executed. Likewise, over the next several decades a few dozen more were convicted as heretics and burned at the stake. Undoubtedly, had Spain not been so fanatically Catholic and repressive, the Reformation would have had far more impact.



Torquemada

PART 2: THE BLOODY REFORMATION

THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

Martin Luther (1483-1546). The lightning rod of the Reformation was Martin Luther, one of the most significant and influential individuals in Western history. In his day Luther was a polarizing and a controversial figure. To his followers, he was a great man of courage and principles who challenged the corrupt and apostate Church of his day. Against great odds, he defied the powerful ecclesiastical and political authorities and became the divinely-appointed catalyst who brought reform and renewal to Western Christianity. Conversely, to his enemies he was a



Martin Luther

dangerous heretic and a schismatic who disrupted the unity in Western Christendom – “a son of perdition” and “a devil in the habit of a monk.” Most modern scholars – Catholic, Protestant, or secular – agree that he was a man of courage, sincerity, and convictions, and that many of his criticisms of the Church were legitimate.

In fact, Luther was only a reluctant reformer. When he launched his campaign against ecclesiastical corruption – primarily aimed at the unethical selling of indulgences – his motive was to spark a robust debate among Church leaders, not create a rupture in the Church. Regardless, the publication of his **95 Theses** in 1517 ignited a firestorm of protest that spread rapidly throughout not only Germany but beyond. Within three years **Pope Leo X** issued a papal bull denouncing Luther as “a son of perdition” and “a wild boar let loose in the vineyard of the Lord,” and ordering all his writings to be burned. In response, Luther publicly burned the rescript in an act of defiant protest.

By this time, Luther had become convinced that the Church was apostate and the pope was an antichrist. Ordered to appear before the Diet of Worms in 1521, he stood resolute in the presence of the emperor and Church officials and uttered the bold declaration:

Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures and plain reason – for I do not accept the authority of popes and councils since it has been

established that they have often erred and contradicted each other – I am bound by the Scriptures.... I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

Under the protection of his prince, **Frederick the Wise** (1463-1525), Luther managed to avoid capture and proceeded with his work, translating the Bible into German and publishing books and tracts advocating fundamental changes in the Catholic Church. In keeping with the spirit of the times, many of his writings, and those of his opponents, employed vehement and often violent rhetoric that further inflamed the passions of both friends and foes.

Soon after Luther’s appearance at the Diet of Worms, violent protests erupted in Wittenberg and spread throughout Germany as anti-Catholic elements ransacked churches, overthrew altars, desecrated images of the saints, and harassed and beat priests. Inspired and emboldened by Luther’s defiance of the established order, a spontaneous mass rebellion against the feudal system then surfaced in southern Germany and Austria. In the previous 50 years there had been several outbreaks of peasant unrest, but none on the scale of the **Peasants Revolt** of 1524-25. Initially, the revolt was non-violent, but when the peasants’ demands were rejected by both Church and state authorities, it quickly erupted into violence and armed conflict. Within 9 months some 300,000 peasants had taken up arms, and by the spring of 1525 rampaging mobs had seized control of 40 monasteries, several castles, and the cities of Erfurt and Salzungen. Led by demagogues such as the pseudo-anabaptist **Thomas Muntzer** and the radical Christian socialist **Michael Gaismair**, the disorganized masses who comprised the revolt wreaked havoc until local lords joined forces and marshaled their troops in response. Soon, local contingents of peasants were being cornered and slaughtered by the thousands. At the Battle of Frankenhausen in May of 1525, the nobles defeated the largest army of peasants led by Muntzer, and within a few weeks the peasants had been routed and the rebellion fizzled out. In all, an estimated 100,000 peasants were massacred in the uprising.

At the outset of the revolt, Luther sympathized with the plight of the peasants. But as the protests spread and became increasingly violent, he was repulsed by the peasants’ radical and anarchist tendencies. A conservative by nature, Luther was also a political realist who understood that the success – indeed, even the survival – of his own movement (not to mention, his own life!) depended upon the protection he

received from powerful German nobles. As the carnage escalated, he wrote a scathing denunciation of the insurrection entitled *Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants* in which he castigated the revolutionaries as “mad dogs” and tools of Satan.

The Schmalkaldic War. For several years relations between the Catholic authorities and Luther’s followers were tense, but two factors forestalled a major confrontation and worked in Luther’s favor: the constantly vacillating machinations of European politics, and the prospects of an invasion of central Europe by the Muslim Turks. It was apparent, however, that the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants would ultimately be decided by force of arms, and in 1531 Protestant princes in German formed a defensive alliance called the Schmalkald League. Catholics responded with the League of Nuremburg, and the stage was set for a major confrontation.

In 1546, a few months after Luther died, the Holy Roman Emperor **Charles V** (r. 1519-56) finally engaged the Protestant princes of Germany in a conflict known as the **Schmalkaldic War**. Charles struck at key Protestant strongholds throughout his domain, and his forces might have won a total victory had he not been forced to divert his forces to guard against the French in the west and the Turks in the south. But a mere 15 months after Luther’s death, Catholic armies marched into Wittenberg, the cradle of Protestantism. However, in the wake of the war Charles V’s fortunes were reversed due to changing political alliances and a more united Protestant resistance, and in 1555 he was compelled to negotiate the **Peace of Augsburg**. According to the terms, Germany’s 224 principalities and independent cities were allowed to choose either Lutheranism or Catholicism, and subjects who were in the religious minority were permitted to emigrate freely. As a result, the treaty left Lutheranism entrenched in northern Germany and Catholicism dominant in the south. Following the emperor’s abdication the following year, his successor **Ferdinand I** (1556-64) was generally tolerant and conciliatory toward Germany’s Protestants, as was **Maximilian II** (r. 1564-76).

THE SPREAD OF LUTHERANISM

Lutheran Scandinavia. At the time of Luther’s death in 1546, his reform movement had spread well beyond the borders of the Holy Roman Empire. In Western Europe, Lutheranism faced stiff competition not only from the Catholic Church but also Calvinism and various Anabaptist sects. But in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, Lutheranism met with more success. Eventually, the faith took hold in all five Scandinavian nations – **Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden and Finland** – as various princes and monarchs adopted it as an alternative to Catholicism. However, their motives were as much political and economic as religious, and were often fueled by resentment toward the Vatican and the opportunity to confiscate lucrative church property for themselves.

Forsays Into Eastern Europe. Lutheranism first spread into Eastern Europe and **Poland** in the early 1520s as many nobles converted for the same political and economic reasons as in Germany and Scandinavia. In addition, by the 1540s Calvinism was also infiltrating many Polish towns and cities. The Catholic Church tried to suppress the spread of Protestantism, but there was considerable anti-Catholic sentiment among the nobility and merchant classes. In 1573 the Compact of Warsaw granted freedom of religion to all religious groups, but in subsequent years the Catholic Counter-Reformation reversed the Protestant gains and suppressed religious liberty to the point that by the mid-17th century Protestantism was nearly extinct in Poland.

In **Bohemia** and **Moravia**, the remnants of the Hussite movement was initially receptive to Lutheranism. However, when the Lutherans and Hussites failed to unite, both groups were eventually persecuted out of existence by Catholic monarchs.

Likewise in **Austria**, Lutherans made some initial inroads, but these advances were soon reversed under the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I (r. 1556-64). Although he tolerated Lutheranism in Germany, Austria was the heart of the Holy Roman Empire, and Frederick was intent upon preserving Catholicism intact. With the support of most of the Austrian nobility, the emperor executed nobles who converted to Lutheranism and succeeded in suppressing the reform movement.

THE HUGUENOT STRUGGLE IN FRANCE

A Turbulent Century. Nowhere was the conflict over religion more volatile than in France. When the ripple effects of Luther's religious protest first reached France, some French Christians welcomed it enthusiastically. Corruption in the Gallican Church was as entrenched and pervasive as anywhere in Christendom. Simony, nepotism and pluralism were widespread, many priests, bishops and abbots flagrantly disregarded their vows of celibacy, and the nobles and aristocrats who filled the ranks of the higher clergy often gained their positions through bribery or political and social connections, enriching themselves in the process and wallowing in luxury. Therefore, at the outset of the Reformation there was considerable support for change throughout France.

Initially, **King Francis I** (r. 1515-47) was ambivalent in his attitude toward the religious dissenters within his realm, but only for pragmatic and political reasons. As a result, for several years the movement germinated and grew under the leadership of courageous reformers such as **Jacques Lefevre**, **Guillaume Briconnet**, and **Guillaume Farel** – and then later under the influence of luminaries such as

Pierre Vivet and **John**

Calvin. But in 1525, as a result of pressure by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Francis began to actively suppress any reformist groups operating within his kingdom. Nonetheless, despite official opposition, by the mid-1560s an estimated two million Frenchmen had converted to the Huguenot faith – about 10% of the



John Calvin

population. But beginning in 1562 full-scale civil war broke out between Protestants and Catholics, and over the next 35 years a total of eight armed conflicts erupted, interspersed with peace treaties that sometimes lasted only a few months. Neither side could win decisively, and much of the killing was the result of street riots and local outbursts.

The status of the Huguenots was always tenuous and often precarious, and during this period political intrigues, assassinations, broken treaties, random acts of violence and gross atrocities were common – the most infamous being the horrific **Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre** in 1572. Following

two years of relative peace, the queen mother **Catherine de Medici** conspired with her son, **Charles IX** (r. 1560-74), to decimate the Huguenot leadership. In a carefully coordinated act of treachery, the king ordered the mayor of Paris to bolt the city gates and mobilize the militia on the night of August 24, 1572. Then, as the palace bells rang out, a systematic slaughter commenced. In all, some 4,000 Huguenots were shot, stabbed or beaten to death.* The massacre ignited an orgy of slaughter that extended into the countryside and provincial towns and cities, and over the next several weeks thousands more were murdered. In Orleans, about a thousand Huguenot men, women, and children were lined up in front of the city wall and butchered, while city officials in Lyon placed Huguenots under "protective custody" in the city jails and convents, only to allow frenzied mobs to storm the facilities and murder the prisoners. Before the purge finally subsided, tens of thousands of Huguenots were dead, including about 6,000 in Paris alone.

The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre broke the back of the Huguenot movement. In the months following the slaughter, thousands of Protestants renounced their faith under the threat of torture. Others reportedly reconverted to Catholicism because they were convinced that Protestantism was an apostate faith – otherwise, God surely would have intervened to protect them. Although Protestantism would survive in France for another century, the Huguenot movement never recovered its momentum and energy, and over this time as many as four million Protestants were either driven into exile or killed in the periodic purges.

In 1598, a quarter of a century after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, **Henry IV** (Henry of Navarre, r. 1589-1610) issued the **Edict of Nantes**, granting the Huguenots religious freedom in the towns where they were in the majority. (However, they were prohibited from worshiping in Paris, the national capital.) The Edict confirmed Roman Catholicism as the national religion, but Huguenot ministers were also granted status as state employees and paid out of public funds. Henry also allowed the Huguenots to garrison 200 forts and strongholds throughout the country for protection. But the Edict was controversial, and despite the king's efforts religious bigotry and fanaticism

* When news of the massacre reached Rome, wild celebrations broke out. A jubilant Pope Gregory XIII ordered bonfires lit and church bells rang out all over the city. For many devout Catholics, the killing of so many Protestant "heretics" was a sign of divine blessing, and the pope even commissioned a special medallion to commemorate "the holy event."

remained a constant in French society. In 1610 Henry himself was assassinated by a militant Catholic who regarded him as a closet Huguenot.

Although the Edict of Nantes remained in effect for another seventy-five years, religious strife in France continued to flare up periodically. Under **Louis XIII** (r. 1610-43) and his principal advisor, **Cardinal Richelieu**, the Huguenots were relegated to second-



Cardinal Richelieu

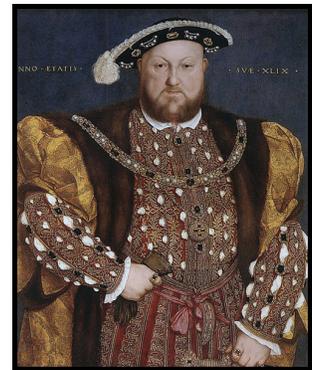
class status. Then in 1621 another civil war broke out, and after eight years of fighting the last Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle fell in 1629. By then the number of Protestants was only about one million, or barely 5% of the French population. Finally, some 50 years later, **Louis XIV** (r. 1643-1715), the self-proclaimed “Sun King”

and the epitome of royal absolutism, initiated a series of measures intended to coerce Protestants into renouncing their faith and returning to the Mother Church. Over time, Huguenots were barred from certain vocations (including the practice of medicine), and Protestant schools and churches were shut down. Then in 1685 Louis issued the **Edict of Fontainebleau**, revoking the Edict of Nantes and outlawing Protestantism altogether. Under pressure, hundreds of thousands of Huguenots renounced their faith and became nominal Catholics, while recalcitrant Huguenots were harassed, imprisoned and even executed. Protestant pastors were martyred, men and boys were enslaved, women were imprisoned, and Huguenot children were placed in foster homes to be raised as Catholics. Although it was strictly illegal to leave the country, there was a flood of Huguenot refugees from France after 1685. (The English word “refugee” originally referred to a Huguenot emigre.) Despite the risks, within a few years nearly two hundred thousand French citizens fled to England, Holland and Germany, while a few thousand others, probably less than five thousand in total, sought sanctuary in British America.

THE ENGLISH REFORMATION: PHASE I

Henry VIII (r. 1509-47). In contrast to the Continental reform movements that centered around formidable scholars and theologians such as Luther and Calvin, the English Reformation was primarily political, secondarily ecclesiastical, and only tangentially theological. In essence, the history of the Reformation in England is the story of four monarchs, and the fate of the Reformation depended mainly on who occupied the throne. For 25 years, beginning with Henry VIII and culminating in the Elizabethan Settlement, Anglicans and Catholics schemed and maneuvered for power before winding up with a state church that was quasi-Catholic. But even then the situation was far from settled as England experienced more religious conflict in the 17th century before the Glorious Revolution of 1689 finally resolved the issue.

With the ascension of Henry VIII to the throne, English ecclesiastical history entered a new phase. For the first 25 years of his reign Henry was a devout Catholic and one of the pope’s most reliable allies, and at the outset of the Reformation he positioned himself as a staunch defender of the Catholic faith. In compliance with a papal bull ordering Luther’s writings to be destroyed, Henry commissioned book burnings at Oxford and



Cambridge universities and at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Never lacking in self-confidence, he even inserted himself into the theological disputes of the day to the point of critiquing Luther’s works, which earned him the title, “Defender of the Faith,” from **Pope Clement VII** (r. 1523-34). Henry also vigorously enforced the church’s ban on vernacular translations of the Bible. For more than a decade his agents pursued **William Tyndale**, and in 1530 he ordered the public execution of the first Protestant martyr in England for smuggling Tyndale’s Bibles into the country.

But Henry’s relations with Rome quickly soured when he decided to divorce his wife, **Catherine of Aragon** (1485-1536), and marry the younger and more attractive **Anne Boleyn** (1507-36). In 1527 Henry petitioned Pope Clement VII to grant an annulment. Under normal circumstances the pope would have been willing to oblige, but in this case political realities dictated otherwise. Catherine was the aunt of the Holy Roman Emperor **Charles V** (r. 1519-56), whose army

was occupying Rome at the time. The pope was a virtual prisoner of the emperor, so when Catherine appealed to her nephew to spare her the humiliation of being deposed, the pope, who could ill afford to offend the emperor, had no alternative but to delay indefinitely Henry's request.

As the stalemate dragged on, Henry became increasingly impatient to the point that in 1531 he declared himself "Protector and Supreme Head of the English Church and Clergy." The next year, Parliament passed a measure prohibiting the clergy from issuing canons (Church laws) without the king's approval, and in 1533 Parliament eliminated the pope's jurisdiction in England and declared the archbishop of Canterbury to be the ultimate ecclesiastical court. Henry also secretly married Anne Boleyn that year, but he still needed an official divorce from the Church.

Thomas More (1478-1535), Lord Chancellor of England and one of Henry's closest friends and advisors, opposed Henry's cavalier approach to religion. As a devout Catholic, More was virulently opposed to Protestantism and Henry's usurpation of papal power. (More once vowed that he would allow Muslims in England before he would permit Protestants to spread their venomous doctrines.) Despite his close relationship to the king, More refused to renounce his allegiance to the pope. In response, Henry ordered More thrown into the Tower of London on trumped-up charges, and in July of 1535 More was beheaded on charges of treason. Soon, executions of other clerical critics of the king followed. Most clerics, however, conveniently accepted the argument that kings were ordained by God, and that to oppose the king was a sin. Such thinking made life simpler – not to mention safer.

In 1533 Henry appointed **Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) the new archbishop of Canterbury, whereupon Cranmer dutifully convened an ecclesiastical court that declared Henry's marriage to Catherine null-and-void. Shortly thereafter, Anne Boleyn was crowned queen of England. The following year, in 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, ending all official connections to the Roman Catholic Church and establishing an independent Church of England, or Anglican Church. The Act recognized the king as "the only Supreme Head on earth of the Church of England" – essentially transforming him into an English pope. In response, **Pope Paul III** (r. 1534-49) promptly excommunicated Henry.

Greedy for more revenue for the imperial treasury, Henry moved to confiscate monastic lands. Collectively, religious houses produced more than

three times the annual income of the king's own land holdings, so beginning in 1536 Parliament ordered the closing of all monasteries with the assets and income reverting to the crown. The seizure and sale of church property was an absolute bonanza for Henry's treasury, more than doubling the income of the English government. Within three years, all religious houses were closed and some 10,000 monks expelled.

Henry VIII was a tyrant who tolerated no disloyalty, and to the end of his life he was a ruthless persecutor of dissidents. For years his agents relentlessly pursued the scholar William Tyndale, who after translating the Bible into English was finally apprehended and burned at the stake in 1536 near Brussels, Belgium. That same year, Henry had fourteen Anabaptists burned to death in England. His forty-year reign was one of the most tyrannical in English history with an estimated 70,000 people executed for various offenses – including two of his six wives.

The Age of Edward. Upon the death of Henry in 1547 he was succeeded by his only son, nine-year-old **Edward VI** (r. 1547-53). Intelligent and sincere, but young and frail, Edward tried to reign as a conscientious Protestant monarch. Under the influence of Cranmer, he promoted a Reformed agenda. Most of his father's draconian heresy laws were repealed, and the persecution of dissidents virtually ceased.



A new *Book of Common Prayer*, compiled and edited primarily by Cranmer, provided a comprehensive liturgy for the Anglican Church, and in 1553 Cranmer authored the Forty-two Articles, a collection of doctrinal statements that reflected a decidedly Reformed position on issues such as *sola scriptura* and justification by faith. Unfortunately, Edward VI died in July 1553 at the age of fifteen. In his brief seven-year reign he had proven to have exceptional intelligence, character, and potential, and there is ample evidence that he could have been one of the great monarchs in history.

"Bloody Mary" Tudor (r. 1553-58). Edward's successor, Mary Tudor, was an unmitigated disaster. As the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, Mary was a militant Catholic and a bitter opponent of Protestantism who moved deftly to reverse the Reformation and restore the Catholic faith. First, she prevailed upon Parliament to criminalize unlicensed preaching, and

then she pressured Parliament into passing the **Act of Repeal** (1553), abrogating the Reformation laws passed under Edward VI. Next, she managed to restore the dreaded anti-heresy laws, after which she negotiated a marriage contract with her Catholic cousin, **Prince Philip** of Spain (later **King Philip II**), the son of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

Mary's reign was marked by violence almost from the outset. A few months after her coronation she was nearly deposed by a Protestant-led rebellion, after which she ordered the execution of her closest rival, **Lady Jane Grey**, and locked up her half-sister, **Elizabeth**, in the Tower of London. Then, beginning early in 1555, her reign turned exceedingly bloody. Taking advantage of the newly re-instituted heresy laws, she targeted influential Protestant leaders. Acting in her capacity as head of the English church, she removed the bishops in ten key dioceses on various trumped-up charges and replaced them with Catholics. Some were simply expelled from office, some were imprisoned in the Tower of London, and others were allowed to flee to the Continent.

Among Mary's first victims was **John Hooper**, the bishop of Gloucester and an avid Calvinist who was regarded as England's "First Puritan." He was burned at the stake in February 1554 – the first English bishop to suffer for his Reformist views. Next, she targeted the renowned Protestant minister and scholar, **John Rogers**, the editor of the Matthew's Bible. In October 1555 two of England's most respected former bishops, **Nicholas Ridley** and **Hugh Latimer**, were tried and convicted of treason. As they were being chained to the stake, Latimer turned and comforted his friend: "Be of good comfort, Brother Ridley, and play the man, for we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England as I trust shall never be extinguished." Mary also arranged to have **Thomas Cranmer**, the former archbishop of Canterbury, condemned to death for treason.

"Bloody Mary's" reign of terror drove an estimated 800 English Protestants into exile. Some settled in Germany, while others sought refuge in Reformed cities such as Zurich, Frankfurt, Strasbourg, and Calvin's Geneva. Her sadistic persecution of Protestants also inspired **John Foxe** to compile one of the most influential books in history, *Acts and Monuments* (a.k.a. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*). But in the end, Mary's tyrannical reign proved counterproductive. Her brutal persecutions and horrifying public executions, which originally served as fascinating (if not grisly) popular entertainment, managed to turn public opinion against her. Along with unusual natural

disasters, poor harvests, and outbreaks of a plague that killed as many as 20% of the English population in the final three years of her reign, many became convinced that God was cursing the nation because of Mary's fanatical Catholicism and vindictive persecutions. By the time she died, Mary was despised throughout the realm.

Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603). The last of England's four monarchs in the 16th century was Queen Elizabeth I, the 25-year-old half-sister of Mary and the



only remaining child of Henry VIII. Like her father, Elizabeth was vain, intelligent, strong-willed, and opinionated. Similarly, she was a master manipulator with impressive political skills who dominated Parliament through persuasion, flattery, patronage, bribery and/or threats. But

unlike her bullish father, she determined to avoid the political and religious chaos that engulfed England and much of Western Europe in the late 16th century. She earned the respect of most of her subjects and generally governed with firmness and common sense.

Elizabeth was a moderate and pragmatic Protestant who endeavored to make the state Church as generic and inclusive as possible for the sake of national unity. She kept her religious views to herself and subordinated them to political expediency. As a committed sacralist, she did not value religious tolerance, believing that it undermined the nation's social and political stability. For archbishop of Canterbury she chose **Matthew Parker**, a moderate Protestant like herself.

Early in her reign two parliamentary acts reestablished England as an officially Protestant nation: The **Act of Supremacy** declared Elizabeth to be the "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England; and the **Act of Uniformity** standardized the liturgy and mandated the prayer book adopted in 1552 under Edward VI.

As a proper and conventional Anglican, Elizabeth had little tolerance for "**Puritans**," strict Calvinists who were intent on reforming the Church of England. Elizabeth wanted to avoid theological controversies, and in 1562 she issued the **Articles of Religion** (or the

“**Thirty-Nine Articles**”) which prohibited disputes over church reform and imposed harsh penalties on nonconformists. She particularly disliked the most radical sect of reformers, the “**Separatists**” (later known in America as “**Pilgrims**”), who believed that true Christians should have nothing to do with the corrupt mainstream Anglican Church. As a result, Elizabeth’s regime, which hardly tolerated moderate Puritans, aggressively harassed and persecuted the Separatists.

Relations with Catholics were even worse as much of the resistance to Elizabeth’s policies came from disenfranchised English Catholics. Early in her reign she attempted to pacify Catholics and maintain cordial relations with Rome, but her moderate policy was doomed from the outset as neither **Pope Pius V** nor **King Philip II** of Spain was willing to let England return to the Protestant fold uncontested. When it was apparent that Elizabeth would never support a Catholic state church in England, the pope condemned her as a heretic and excommunicated her in 1570. As the situation deteriorated, she was forced to become more aggressive in her response to her Catholic opponents. During her reign some 200 Catholics were executed on charges of treason – most of whom were hung, drawn and quartered.

The situation deteriorated further when in 1581 Elizabeth dispatched troops to Holland to assist **William of Orange’s** revolt against Spain. With that, **Pope Sixtus V** offered Philip II one million gold ducats to invade England and depose Elizabeth. To overthrow Elizabeth, Philip prepared an “**Invincible Armada**” of 130 warships and 30,000 soldiers and sailors. From the outset, however, the campaign was a disaster. Storms, poor provisions, and the proficiency of England’s naval forces sent 56 Spanish ships and more than 20,000 men to the bottom of the sea.

With that, it appeared that England’s political perils and religious controversies might be resolved, but that was far from the case. The 17th century would prove to be as turbulent as the 16th with religious disputes playing a central role.

THE ENGLISH REFORMATION: PHASE II

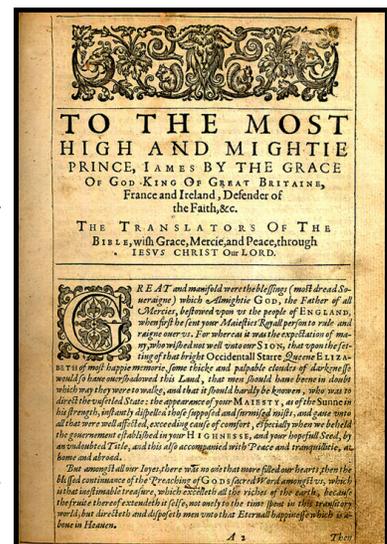
King James I (r. 1603-25). When Elizabeth died in 1603 without an heir, Parliament offered the crown to James VI of Scotland. James was a distant cousin of Elizabeth and the first in a line of four Stuart monarchs who ruled England for most of the 17th century.

Reigning as King James I of England, he was a royal absolutist at heart whose most cherished principle was the “divine right of kings.” Raised in a luxurious royal bubble, James was as imperious as he was unprincipled and corrupt. His philosophy of government can be summarized in his declaration that kings should rule as “little Gods on Earth” – or as he proclaimed on one occasion, “The king comes from God, and law comes from the king.” In general, his was not a placid reign as he constantly sparred with Parliament over taxes, the national budget, foreign policy, and religious issues.

James had been raised among Scottish Presbyterians, but he was no devotee of John Calvin and John Knox. In reality, he was a very worldly man who took religion casually. Nonetheless, when he first ascended to the English throne Puritans hoped that he would be sympathetic to their cause. Therefore, at the outset they presented him with the Millenary Petition calling for substantive reforms in the Church of England.

James received the petition and agreed to call an ecclesiastical conference to meet at Hampton Court in 1604, but there was little doubt that his sympathies lay with the Anglican establishment. Presiding over the proceedings, he agreed to some minor reforms but rejected most of the Puritan agenda. However, in one significant concession, he commissioned a committee of scholars to produce an official translation of the Bible for all Anglican churches, and in 1611 the **Authorized (King James) Version** of the Bible was published.

In other respects, despite generally cordial relations with Puritan leaders early in his reign, James steadfastly supported the conservative Anglican



establishment, and he appointed mostly non-Puritans to prestigious positions. Similar to his mother's prejudice against Presbyterians, he disliked Puritans personally and regarded them as dogmatic and sanctimonious. He was also aware that Puritans opposed royal absolutism and the king's luxurious lifestyle. Even worse, many Puritans seriously doubted that the king was even a true Christian, and their preference for congregationalism undermined his view that the king had a divine right to control the churches through a formal hierarchy.

Over the years James developed a genuine loathing for Puritans, but he never managed to totally subjugate them due to the fact that there were tens of thousands of them, many of whom were socially and politically prominent. Other nonconformists, however, were more vulnerable to harassment and persecution – in particular, groups such as the Baptists and Separatists. In the case of the latter, their plight became so unbearable that in 1607 some 200 of them sought sanctuary in Holland. Twelve years later, out of sheer desperation, about a hundred set out for America where they founded the Plymouth Colony.

Charles I (r. 1625-49). James I died in 1625 and was succeeded by his son, Charles. Like his father, Charles was a royal absolutist, except even more imperious, tactless and vulgar than his father. Under his regime relations between the monarchy and Parliament – and the English public in general – grew increasingly strained.

Charles was a virtual Catholic who was married to a French Catholic princess. While he found it difficult to tolerate Anglicans, he was openly hostile toward Puritans. Therefore, he appointed mostly “high church” Anglicans to leadership positions in the Church who were more sympathetic to Catholic ways and means. Charles also infuriated Puritans by promoting Sunday recreations such as archery, dancing, and maypoles, all of which Puritans found objectionable. As tensions and conflicts between the two parties grew more intense, the king began criticizing and harassing the Puritans to the fullest extent of his power, even vowing on one occasion, “I will make them conform themselves, or else I will harrie them out of the land, or do worse.” As a result of the king's policies, tens of thousands of Puritans left England in the 1630s and '40s and emigrated to America. Since most of them were solid, sober and industrious middle-class citizens, the Puritan exodus was more than just a religious drain. In fact, England lost many of its best people.

Under Charles I, relations between the monarchy and Parliament continued to degenerate. Notoriously hot-tempered, the king dismissed Parliament on several

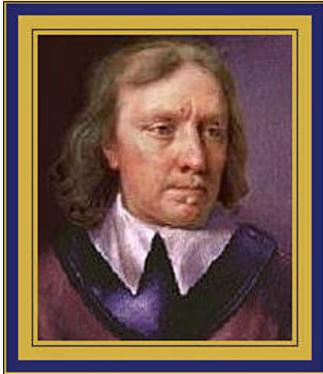
occasions, and for eleven years (1629-40) he ruled entirely without the legislature. When insurrections broke out in Scotland and Ireland and Parliament refused to authorize him to use the army to quell the revolts, Charles recruited a private army of mercenaries. Then in 1642 the king made the fateful mistake of attempting to arrest five Members of Parliament for treason, which prompted the House of Commons to raise an army in its own defense. When Charles fled to Oxford and called upon his loyal subjects to defend him, it sparked one of the longest and bloodiest wars in English history.

The English Civil War (1642-51). The war that ensued was primarily a contest between competing political ideologies: royal absolutism versus constitutional government. It was also, in a sense, a class war as it pitted the traditional aristocracy and their rural supporters against the more progressive rural gentry and urban burgesses. But as one of the last of Europe's so-called “religious wars,” there was also a strong religious component to this conflict as the two sides were divided along denominational lines. Many of the king's supporters were establishment Anglicans and Catholics, while the Parliamentary forces were largely Puritans, Presbyterians, and evangelical “Independent” Protestants.

The English Civil War was a convoluted conflict that went through several phases involving shifting alliances. In the first phase of the war the king's supporters, generically called “Royalists” or “Cavaliers,” fought “Roundheads” – so called because they shaved their hair to distinguish themselves from the long-haired, “worldly” Cavaliers. While the king drew support primarily from the ranks of the elite aristocracy and his supporters in the countryside, Parliament's forces included many in the bourgeois gentry and burgess classes along with those who believed in constitutional government. Early in the war the Roundhead coalition was comprised not only of Puritans and other religious dissenters but Scottish Presbyterian “Covenanters” who enthusiastically joined the effort to oust King Charles I.

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658). The English Civil War produced one military genius, Oliver Cromwell, who along with his New Model Army of Protestant crusaders crushed the king's forces. Cromwell's troops were well-armed and well-disciplined, and they fought tenaciously in what they considered to be a righteous cause. Accompanied by a fife and drum corps, they marched into battle singing hymns as they encountered, and repeatedly defeated, a more experienced army led by professional officers.

With each battlefield victory Cromwell became more convinced that he was God's instrument to bring about a new social, political and religious order in England.



Following the king's surrender in 1646, religious factionalism destroyed the unity in the Parliamentary ranks. As Presbyterians gained control of Parliament they moved to pass legislation that discriminated not only against Catholics and Anglicans but also

Independents and other religious minorities. The result was a second brief civil war in which an odd alliance of Presbyterians, Royalists, Scots, and Welsh united against Cromwell's Independents. Once again, Cromwell's forces prevailed, and in December 1648 Parliament was purged of its Presbyterian members.

Charles I was captured in 1646 and put on trial for treason in 1648. A High Court of Justice found him guilty and sentenced him to death as a "tyrant, traitor, murderer and public enemy." Cromwell, who considered regicide to be a grave matter, hesitated to sign the execution order, but he finally relented on the basis that the king had been a traitor and "a man of blood" whose death was "a cruel necessity." But in a strange turn of events, public opinion turned against Cromwell and the Puritans. Overlooking how corrupt, devious and oppressive Charles I had been, many began to blame Cromwell and his allies for most of the death and devastation brought on by the war.

Meanwhile in Ireland, militant nationalists used the chaos of the Civil War to foment another rebellion of their own. Early in the Civil War they had allied with King Charles I and the Royalists in return for certain concessions, and in 1641 Irish Catholics had slaughtered an estimated 40-50,000 English Protestants in Ulster in northern Ireland. For several years their independence movement seemed to succeed until Cromwell landed with a large invasion force in August of 1649 and began a systematic campaign to crush the rebellion. It was a bloody and brutal campaign as Cromwell's troops were bent on revenge for the slaughter of the Ulster Protestants eight years earlier.

Following a prolonged siege of Drogheda, Cromwell ordered the execution of all the survivors who were capable of bearing arms. Charging that the Irish resistors were "barbarous wretches," Cromwell justified their execution as "a righteous judgment of

God" that would "prevent the effusion of blood for the future." Nearly 3,500 people were killed, including 2,700 captured soldiers, 700 civilians, and a few Catholic priests whom Cromwell claimed were bearing arms. Later, hundreds more Irish resistors were massacred at Wexford.

Cromwell's subjugation of the Irish rebellion resulted in some of the bloodiest massacres in the whole turbulent history of Anglo-Irish relations. For Cromwell's English Protestants, Irish Catholic lives counted for little, and over a four-year span hundreds of thousands of Irish died as a result of the insurrection, starvation and disease. Furthermore, when the war finally subsided Parliament confiscated much of the Catholic-owned land in northern Ireland and distributed it among Cromwell's soldiers and other Protestant English immigrants. Even to this day the Irish regard Oliver Cromwell as one of the great villains in history.

As Cromwell's forces were suppressing the Irish Rebellion, a similar insurrection broke out in Scotland. Presbyterian "Covenanters" had opposed the execution of Charles I for fear that Parliament would rescind Scottish independence and try to absorb the country into a new English Commonwealth. So in a bizarre turn of events, Scottish authorities offered the crown of Scotland to **Prince Charles**, the oldest son of Charles I who had been living in exile in France. Prince Charles landed in Scotland in June 1650 and took command of a combined force of Covenanters and Royalists, but within a month Cromwell arrived from Ireland, besieged Edinburgh, and pacified much of southern Scotland by the end of the year. However, it took more than another year before Parliamentary forces finally quelled the revolt.

The Westminster Assembly (1646). In 1643, a year after the Civil War began, Parliament called for an ecclesiastical assembly to formulate a standard creed and polity for the English and Scottish churches. The Church of Scotland had recently replaced episcopalianism with presbyterianism, and many English Protestants were of a similar persuasion. Dominated by presbyterian Puritans, the assembly eventually issued its summary statement, the **Westminster Confession of Faith**, a masterful systematization of the foundational tenets of Reformed theology.

The Westminster clerics intended that the Confession would serve as the creedal standard for an English Presbyterian state church that would replace the Church of England. However, Cromwell was committed to religious freedom, so Presbyterianism

was never established as the official state church of England. In Scotland, the Confession did become the “subordinate standard” of doctrine in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

The Interregnum (1649-60). In the period following the war, the Commonwealth of England passed from one experimental government to another. Throughout the period Cromwell governed as “Lord Protector” – in effect, a virtual dictator. Although a believer in Parliamentary government, he became convinced that only a military dictatorship could save England from civil strife and transform the nation into a holy commonwealth. After several unsuccessful attempts to govern with Parliament, he suspended the legislature and put the nation under martial law.

Most historians regard Cromwell as a gifted military commander but an intolerant and self-righteous religious fanatic who attempted to impose a Puritan dictatorship in England. Although there is some truth in this assessment, it is also important to note that few leaders in world history have exercised as much power and abused it less than Cromwell. Apparently a genuinely sincere and devout Christian, he used his authority to promote social justice and moral reforms. Early on, when Parliament offered him the crown, he refused to accept it. In stark contrast to virtually all the great monarchs and dictators in world history, he resisted the temptation to use his position to enrich himself and his family.

Surprisingly, Cromwell also sought to expand the parameters of religious tolerance as much as possible. He prohibited the persecution of Quakers and other nonconformist religious groups, and he offered sanctuary to European Jews seeking religious liberty. According to the Puritan minister Richard Baxter, there was never a time when the word of God brought so many people to faith as during the Cromwellian era, and in fact he was magnanimous in his treatment of all sects other than his most ardent opponents, the Catholics and high-church Anglicans.

Throughout these turbulent years Cromwell believed that God had chosen him to be an instrument of righteousness for the salvation of England. But although his Protectorate accomplished much and he ruled with relative effectiveness, his popularity suffered the longer he held power. As a strict and non-sense Puritan, Cromwell was, like most Christians until modern times, a sacralist. His ideal society was one in which church and state cooperated to co-ruled society. As a result, he promoted laws forbidding public vices such as profanity, drinking, dancing, theater-going and card-playing, and he even banned the

traditional Catholic Holy Day of Christmas. In the minds of many of his countrymen, “Merry Ol’ England” had become overly serious, sober, sanctimonious and stultifying under Puritan rule.

When Cromwell died his son, **Richard Cromwell** (1626-1712), succeeded him as Lord Protector. Lacking both his father’s military credentials and political skills, he ruled for less than a year before losing the support of the army and key politicians. Almost unimaginably, public opinion favored restoring the Stuart monarchy.

The Restoration and Glorious Revolution. Following the forced resignation of Richard Cromwell, Parliament foolishly restored the Stuart monarchy by inviting Prince Charles, the eldest son of Charles I, to reclaim the throne. Having lived for more than a decade in France, **Charles II** (r. 1660-85) played the role of a Protestant constitutional monarch, but in fact he wished to see Catholicism reestablished in England and to rule as an absolutist like his model, King Louis XIV of France. As a closet Catholic, Charles supported universal religious tolerance, but Parliament was determined to reestablish Anglicanism as the official state Church as in the era of Queen Elizabeth. Over the next fifteen years Parliament passed various acts that discriminated against not only Catholics but Puritans and other “Nonconformists” including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Quakers and Baptists. Thousands were harassed, banished, fined, or imprisoned – most notably **John Bunyan**, whose *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) became the second-biggest selling book in history next to the Bible.



John Bunyan

Charles’ relations with Parliament deteriorated over the years to the point that he dissolved it in 1681 and ruled his final years as virtually an absolute monarch. In one last parting insult, he admitted on his deathbed that he had in fact been a life-long Catholic.

Charles II died without a legitimate heir, so succession passed on to his younger brother James, the Duke of York, who ruled as **James II** (r. 1685-88). Unlike his wily brother, James was an unabashed Catholic who had publicly converted in 1670. Therefore, his ascension to the throne was highly controversial, and his three-year reign was as stormy as it was brief.

In an unprecedented display of hubris, James informed Parliament that he had the authority to veto its laws, and that he intended to repeal several acts that had been passed over his brother's objections. In 1687 he unilaterally issued a Declaration of Indulgence granting all of his subjects freedom of religion – a measure obviously intended to favor Roman Catholics. The constitutional crisis reached the boiling point when the king, once again defying law and tradition, ordered a standing army to camp a few miles outside London so as to intimidate his opponents in Parliament. But it was the birth of his son that ignited the revolution that deposed him. Apparently, many Englishmen were willing to endure James' rule because he was already in his fifties and, it was assumed, he would be succeeded by his Protestant daughter **Mary**, the Queen of Holland and wife of **William of Orange**. However, a new direct heir to the throne meant that England would probably be ruled by a Catholic monarch for at least another generation.

In reaction, political leaders initiated secret negotiations with William and Mary, beseeching their help in deposing James. A deal was struck, and in November 1688 William and Mary landed in England with a Dutch army and promptly deposed the misfit king. This was the “Glorious Revolution” that opened up a new era in English history. The following year Parliament passed a **Bill of Rights** securing the authority of Parliament and the basic civil liberties of English citizens, followed by the **Act of Toleration** which allowed all religious groups except Roman Catholics and Unitarians to meet openly and freely. For the most part the Act ended the harassment and persecution of religious Nonconformists and was a significant step in the long and winding road to full religious liberty for all English citizens.

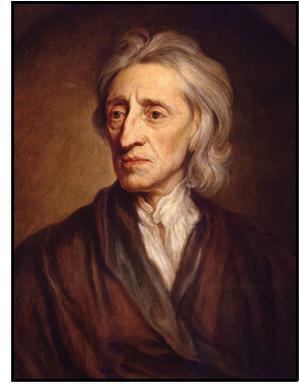
One notable expatriot who returned to England in the wake of the Glorious Revolution was the philosopher **John Locke** (1632-1704). An ardent proponent of republican-style government and religious liberty, Locke was one of the most influential intellectuals in modern history. (A century later, Thomas Jefferson would regard Locke as one of the “three greatest men” who ever lived – along with Sir Isaac Newton and Francis Bacon.) Locke's political philosophy was formulated during the turbulent reign of Charles II, and his *First Treatise on Government*, a refutation of the doctrine of royal absolutism and the “divine right of kings,” argued that hereditary monarchy is the least rational form of government. In his *Second Treatise on Government* he essentially defined Classical Liberal political philosophy based on

the tenets of individual natural rights, limited government, the social contract theory of government, and a written constitution that establishes the rule of law.

In *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689-92), Locke also set forth the case for religious tolerance on the basis of three propositions:

- (1) Government officials are unqualified to judge between the competing truth-claims of various religious groups;
- (2) Even if government officials *were* qualified to arbitrate such differences, enforcing a single “true religion” would not have the desired effect because religious beliefs cannot be compelled by force; and
- (3) Attempting to coerce religious uniformity would inevitably lead to more social disorder than allowing diversity.

Note: Regarding religious tolerance, Locke was influenced by English Baptists such as **John Smyth** and **Thomas Helwys**, and by **Roger Williams**, the founder of Rhode Island colony in America who advocated democratic government, religious liberty, and the separation of church and state. However, there were limits to Locke's liberality when it came to religion: He urged governmental authorities not to tolerate atheism, believing that the denial of God's existence undermined the social order and would inevitably lead to chaos.



TRIAL BY FIRE: THE ANABAPTIST EXPERIENCE

The Radical Reformation. Concurrent with the mainstream Protestant Reformation were several diverse and independent movements whose main similarity was that they all operated outside the mainstream Catholic and Protestant churches. Sometimes referred to as the “left-wing” of the Reformation, the Radical Reformation challenged not only the religious establishments of the 16th century but the political, social and economic orders as well. As a result, the movement was considered dangerous and seditious by the political and ecclesiastical elite.

In general, the various groups and individuals associated with the Radical Reformation can be divided into four broad categories:

- (1) “Free church” Anabaptists;
- (2) Sacralistic Anabaptists;
- (3) Spiritualists; and
- (4) Rationalists.

The most significant of these groups listed were the “**free church**” Anabaptists. Although Anabaptist groups were autonomous and independent with no centralized leadership, there were a few general characteristics that the “free church” Anabaptists held in common:

- True Christians are those who have made a commitment to follow the teachings of Christ and have been baptized as a mark of identification with Christ. (An “Anabaptist” was one who had been “rebaptized” as an adult.)
- The exclusive source of authority should be the Bible (primarily the New Testament), not church tradition.
- Christians should hold radical countercultural values and practice a simple, non-materialistic, and community-based lifestyle.
- Christians should separate themselves from mainstream Christendom, which is apostate.
- Anti-sacralism: The true church of Jesus Christ is a voluntary and intentional community of believers who are independent of any association with the state.
- True Christians should practice religious tolerance and non-violence. As **Menno Simons** (1496-1561), the founder of the Mennonite sect, explained: “All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good unto those who abuse and persecute them; to turn the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me, how can a Christian defend scripturally retaliation, rebellion, war,

[violence], killing, torturing, stealing, robbing and plundering and burning cities, and invading countries?”

Sacralistic Anabaptists shared many of these same tenets, except that they placed more emphasis on the Old Testament. Therefore, like the mainline Protestants, they sought to establish a Christianized sacralistic society along the lines of ancient Israel. Sacralistic Anabaptists were not pacifists, and many were radical millenarians who believed the return of Christ was imminent and would be ushered in through a great war between the righteous and the apostate. For the most part, this sect disintegrated following the siege of their stronghold of Munster, German in 1535 and the great slaughter that ensued.

Spiritualists (a.k.a. Inspirationists) were illuminists and mystics who focused on the special revelation of the Holy Spirit. Influenced by medieval mysticism, they put more emphasis on the internal guidance of the Holy Spirit than the Bible or church tradition. As radical individualists, spiritualists tended to be relatively unconcerned about the state of the visible church, nor did they share the “free church” Anabaptists’ commitment to restoring the New Testament church.

Rationalists took Renaissance-era humanism to its logical extent. For them, human reasoning rather than the Bible or special revelation should be one’s ultimate source of authority in spiritual and moral matters. As the theological ancestors of the deists, rationalists were skeptical of miracles and doctrines such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the Incarnation.

Origins of Anabaptism. Anabaptism was a grassroots, mostly underground movement that spread across much of Europe in the late 1520s and thereafter. Unlike most other reform movements, Anabaptism was never unified, nor did it have any recognized authority figure. Remarkably, the movement survived even though nearly the whole first generation of leaders were killed within the first two years.

Anabaptism began in a home Bible study group led by **Huldrych Zwingli** in Zurich in the early 1520s, only about five years after Luther posted his 95 Theses. Zwingli challenged many Catholic dogmas and traditions, and inadvertently he sowed the seeds of what became the Anabaptist movement. Idealistic young radicals including **Conrad Grebel** (1498-1526) and **Felix Mantz** (1498-1527) eventually broke with Zwingli over issues related to sacralism and infant baptism. Zwingli, however, needed the support of the Zurich city council to carry out his reform agenda, and when he refused to challenge the sacralistic union

between church and state the radicals broke off to form their own “free church” – what would later be called the **Swiss Brethren**.

The movement formally began on January 21, 1525 when Grebel and **George Blaurock** (1492-1529) a former priest, baptized each other “in the apostolic manner” – i.e., upon their confession of faith. As the movement spread, their opponents called them “**anabaptists** (“rebaptizers”), but in effect they were radical evangelicals. As the Mennonite historian William Estep comments:

This was clearly the most revolutionary act of the Reformation. No other event so completely symbolized the break with Rome. Here, for the first time in the course of the Reformation, a group of Christians dared to form a church after what was conceived to be the New Testament pattern.” [*The Anabaptist Story* (William B. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 11]

Grebel and Mantz left their homes and families, sold all their possessions, and formed an itinerant ministry as traveling evangelists. Within a couple of months they were imprisoned for illegal preaching, after which Grebel died from the harsh treatment he’d received. Mantz was executed for “heresy” a few months later, and within two years George Blaurock was burned at the stake. Over the next few years many other Anabaptist leaders met the same fate, often after being subjected to excruciating torture.

A History of Harassment and Persecution.

This was only the beginning of what would become one of the most shameful chapters in the history of the Reformation era. For nearly a century-and-a-half, tens of thousands of Anabaptists were hounded, harassed, humiliated, and martyred for their faith. The persecutions began in the Catholic cantons of Switzerland in 1525, and then spread to the Protestant areas. Three years later the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V decreed that Anabaptists should be arrested and executed. Many Protestant church leaders and civic officials agreed based on three pretexts:

- (1) Anabaptists were heretics, schismatics, and pseudo-Christians. As the historian Rudolph Heinze comments, “The fact that Anabaptists refused to baptize infants threatened a principle at the heart of medieval society – the identification of the civic and the religious communities.” [*Reform and Conflict*, p. 168]
- (2) Anabaptists were anti-sacralistic. Because they espoused religious freedom, Anabaptists posed a threat to the homogeneous sacralism that was the basis of European society, religion and politics.

- (3) Anabaptists were unpatriotic, subversive and revolutionary. Most were pacifists who practiced nonresistance and refused to fight for the state. Likewise, most refused to swear oaths or serve in civic offices, so they were accused of being disloyal and unpatriotic. In addition, many Anabaptists called for social egalitarianism, which threatened the socio/political status quo in European society.

In truth, the main reason why Anabaptists were subjected to such ridicule and abuse was because they were perceived as heretics and rivals by Protestants and Catholics alike. Reformation historians estimate that of the many thousands of Anabaptists who suffered and died for their faith, about 85% of all the victims were executed by Catholic authorities. In *The Martyr’s Mirror*, first published in 1660, the Mennonite chronicler **Thielman J. Van Braht** documented more than 800 accounts of Anabaptist persecutions over the previous 130 years.



Menno Simons

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC COUNTER-REFORMATION

A Spiritual and Moral Crisis. At the outset of the Reformation, Catholic authorities often reacted to the Protestant challenge by resorting to intimidation, coercion, and outright persecution. This tactic succeeded in silencing protest to some extent, but in the long run it was counterproductive. What the Church needed were four things:

- (1) Genuine spiritual and moral renewal;
- (2) Serious and substantive doctrinal reforms;
- (3) Institutional reforms; and
- (4) A strong and convincing apologetic to counter the arguments of their Protestant critics.

Among those advocating serious moral and institutional reforms, **Gian Matteo Giberti** (1485-1543), the bishop of Verona, was one of the most influential. Realizing that true reform required more than preaching and political power, Giberti rejected the typical opulent lifestyle of the higher clergy for a life of simple austerity. Beginning in the late 1520s he reprimanded, punished, and dismissed members of the clergy and religious orders who abused their office and were guilty of laziness, immorality and corruption. Similarly, **Gasparo Contarini** (1483-1542) emerged as a leading reform figure in the 1520s and '30s. Renowned as one of the Church's spiritual and moral leaders, he was appointed a cardinal in 1535 by Pope Paul III (r. 1534-49) and head of a Papal Reform Commission to investigate corruption in the Church and propose changes.



Cardinal Gasparo Contarini

In terms of spiritual renewal, mystics such as **Teresa of Avila** (1515-82) sought to counter corruption in the Church and the advance of Protestantism by emphasizing traditional spiritual disciplines. Her writings on contemplative spirituality, such as *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*, were admired by many Catholics and Protestants alike. Teresa's colleague, **John of the Cross** (1542-91), also wrote eloquently on spiritual themes. However, mystics such as Teresa and John had a negligible impact on the spiritual and moral condition of mainstream Catholicism, nor were they able to stem the tide of the Reformation.

The Pathetic Papacy. A major contributing factor to the spiritual and moral malaise in the Catholic Church – and a prime reason for the early success of the Reformation – was the deplorable state of papal leadership. In the Vatican and among the higher echelons in the Catholic Church, there were few men of ability who had the credibility to challenge the Protestants. The pope at the outset of the Reformation, **Leo X** (r. 1513-21) was so utterly corrupt and depraved that he was oblivious to the real concerns of devout Catholics. His successor, **Pope Adrian VI** (r. 1522-23) seemed sincerely committed to reform, but he died after only a year in office. Adrian VI admitted that for many years there had been “abominable offenses in spiritual matters and violations of the commandments committed at this Holy See,” and that “the first thing that must be done is to reform the *curia*, the origin of all the evil.”

Clement VII (r. 1523-34), a cousin of Leo X, shared many of the unsavory qualities of his kinsman. While the Protestant and Anabaptist movements were spreading like wildfire, he showed little intelligence and imagination in dealing with the crisis. Therefore, by the time **Pope Paul III** (r. 1534-49) assumed the papal throne in 1534, monolithic Catholic Christendom had been irrevocably shattered. Although a typical Renaissance pope – corrupt and worldly – Paul III was realistic enough to understand that the Church needed a proactive response to the charges being leveled against it. Against the advice of many in the *curia*, he appointed a Papal Reform Commission under Cardinal Contarini to investigate problems in the Church and recommend necessary changes. In 1537 the committee published its report, “Advice Concerning Reform of the Church,” in which it criticized previous popes, the college of cardinals, and other Church leaders for their corruption, immorality, and hypocrisy. The report was so revealing that Protestants eagerly circulated it in order to further discredit the Church.

An Intellectual Response. In defense of the Catholic faith, one of the Church's most articulate apologists was **Johanne Eck**, an accomplished and influential scholar and theologian who had debated Luther in 1518. Although he could hold his own in theological and philosophical debates, Eck was at a distinct disadvantage trying to defend a Church and a tradition that was so vulnerable due to centuries of doctrinal accretions, some of which were not only extra-biblical but even contradictory.

The foremost Catholic apologist of the 16th century was **Robert Bellarmine**, a Jesuit theologian who rose to the rank of cardinal. Bellarmine's *magnum opus* was

On the Controversies of the Christian Faith (1593), a detailed critique of Protestantism that served as the standard in Catholic apologetics for the next 300 years. Another notable figure was **Caesar Baronius**, whose *Ecclesiastical Annals* was a Catholic response to a major Protestant work on church history, the *Centuries of Magdeburg*, which argued that Catholic tradition distorted and corrupted the purity of New Testament Christianity. Baronius attempted to demonstrate that controversial Catholic doctrines and practices were in fact based on the early church, although many of the sources on which he based his thesis were later determined to be spurious.

The Theological Response: The Council of Trent (1545-48; 51-52; 62-63). In 1541, **Emperor Charles V** called on Catholics and Protestants to end the religious schism for the sake of Christian unity. But as usual, the emperor had ulterior motives. The Holy Roman Empire was being threatened on two fronts by France in the West and the Ottoman Turks in the South. In addition, Charles reasoned that if he could convince moderate Protestants to reconcile with Rome, it would alienate hard-core extremists such as Luther and Calvin. Naturally, he hoped the Protestants would simply capitulate and return to the Catholic fold.

The Protestant contingent included luminaries such as **Philip Melancthon** and **Martin Bucer**. Even **John Calvin** attended, although unenthusiastically and mostly out of a sense of obligation. The Catholic delegation was led by Cardinal Contarini, one of the most principled and respected men in the Church who, unlike many in the Catholic hierarchy, sought reconciliation with Protestants through substantive reforms and dialogue rather than by intimidation and coercion.

The **Regensburg Colloquy** focused on 23 key doctrinal issues. The two sides reached a consensus on some points, and even agreed on a carefully-worded (and intentionally ambiguous) statement on the doctrine of Justification. But on other matters, including papal supremacy and the meaning of the mass and the Eucharist, no progress was forthcoming. The conference eventually dissolved amid disunity, and in his report to the emperor Contarini noted: “In several articles the Protestants have departed from the common understanding of the universal church. It is our hope that, with the help of God, they will yet reject these and that in time they will come to agree with us.”

Four years later – and nearly thirty years after Luther first ignited the protest movement that would become the Reformation – the Catholic Church finally convened an ecumenical council at Trent to deal with

the schism and other issues of concern. Conservative and reformist factions brought different agendas to the Council, and both sides eventually had to settle for compromise. Originally, the Council was conceived as a great ecumenical council, but Protestant delegates were excluded from the proceedings until most doctrinal issues had already been decided.

When Lutherans were finally invited to join the Council in 1552, they insisted that all previous decisions be reconsidered. When the Catholic clerics (predictably) rejected their demands, the Protestants could not justify participating in a conference in which the deck was stacked against them.

Meeting periodically over an 18-year period, the Council of Trent failed to reunify Christendom but succeeded in clarifying Catholic dogma. In the course of time, it reaffirmed most every Catholic doctrine that Protestants disputed, including:

- Protestantism and Anabaptism are heresies.
- The doctrines of Justification and Sanctification are linked as part of a salvation process in which the sinner is made righteous. According to the Council: “The doctrine of justification by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) is damnable and condemns to everlasting judgment anyone who embraces it.”
- The Bible – *as interpreted by the Catholic Church and Catholic tradition* – is authoritative in all matters related to faith and practice. However, the Bible should not be interpreted in any way contrary to “the holy mother Church.”
- Church tradition is equal in authority to the Bible.
- The pope is the universal leader of the Church.
- Those who reject the doctrines of penance and purgatory are condemned.
- The doctrine of the intercession of the saints is valid.
- The doctrine of transubstantiation is valid.
- The Latin Vulgate is the only officially-approved translation of the Bible; the Bible should not be translated into the vernacular.

In addition to other measures that addressed issues related to corruption in the Church, the Council officially endorsed the Inquisition and published the infamous *Index of Forbidden Books*.

The Council of Trent essentially defined Catholic theology and ecclesiology for the next 400 years – until Vatican II in 1964. If the reforms had been implemented a hundred years earlier, there might never have been a major protest movement on the scale of the Protestant Reformation.

The Activist Response. One of the driving forces in a Catholic counter-reformation was the Society of Jesus (or Jesuits), founded in 1534 by **Ignatius of Loyola** (1491-1556) and **Francis Xavier** (1506-52).



Ignatius of Loyola

Both men considered themselves to be Christian knights in the service of the Catholic Church as they devoted their life to two causes: promoting renewal and reform in the Church; and engaging in the ideological battle against the two main enemies of the true faith – Islam and Protestantism. In 1540, at the recommendation of Cardinal Contarini, Pope Paul III officially sanctioned the Jesuit order, and Ignatius was designated the superior general.

From that point on the Jesuits became a vital force in the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Many worked clandestinely throughout Europe to defeat what Ignatius called the Protestant “plague of heresy.” The strategy was to delegitimize Protestantism through “sound theology” and “good arguments from Scripture, tradition, the councils and the doctors [of the Church].” However, having acquired the reputation as “papal pit bulls,” Jesuits were not averse to defeating heresy by more forceful measures. With total dedication and grim determination, they were integrally involved in the Inquisition that persecuted thousands of Protestants and Anabaptists.

The Enforcement Mechanism: The Spanish Inquisition. **King Philip II** of Spain (r. 1556-98), Europe’s most determined enforcer of militant Catholicism, feared that Protestantism would disrupt the status quo in Spain and undermine his authority as had happened to Charles V and the Holy Roman Empire. As recounted earlier, the Spanish Inquisition had been established in 1478 under Ferdinand and Isabella, and for the next century a church-sanctioned reign of terror stalked the cities, towns, and rural villages of Spain. Normal legal rights were suspended in Inquisition courts as the accused, who were assumed guilty unless they could prove their innocence, were tried secretly.

Inquisitors were authorized to extract confessions by any means necessary, which gave rise to sadistic

new torture devices such as thumb screws and the horrifying “Iron Maiden,” designed to break the victim’s will and bring quick confessions. In cases related to heresy, those who refused to recant were burned at the stake. [Note: Heretics were burned to prepare them for the hell-fire that would torment them for the rest of eternity. In Spain and Italy, the victims were burned alive, while in most of the rest of Europe they were strangled to death before the bonfires were lit.]

The Inquisition was effective. Through a policy of institutionalized terror, the unholy alliance of church and state eliminated virtually all vestiges of Protestantism and Anabaptism in Spain. Likewise, non-Catholic “heresies” were exterminated in many other parts of Europe, and in the century after the Council of Trent Catholicism regained its supremacy in France, Belgium, Austria, Bavaria, Bohemia, and Poland.

THE DUTCH WARS OF INDEPENDENCE (1566-1609; 1621-48)

Protestantism in the Low Countries. In the early years of the Reformation, both Lutheranism and Anabaptism spread into **Holland and Belgium**. After the Munster debacle in 1535, peaceful Anabaptists such as the followers of **Menno Simons** became the major Anabaptist sect. Beginning in the 1550s Calvinism replaced Lutheranism as the major Protestant faith, and in the following decade **Guy de Bray**, a protégé of Calvin, formalized Reformed theology in the Low Countries in the **Belgic Confession** of 1561.

For the first 30 years of the Reformation, the Holy Roman Emperor **Charles V** (r. 1519-56) ruthlessly suppressed both Protestantism and Anabaptism. He prevailed upon the Council of State to enact various anti-heresy laws, and he used the Inquisition to route-out non-Catholics. Hundreds of dissenters were persecuted, including the great Bible scholar and translator **William Tyndale**, and even those who recanted were often burned at the stake. However, the persecutions were never popular, even among the Catholics of the Netherlands, and by the end of Charles V’s reign he had largely given up trying to exterminate non-Catholic sects.

The First Dutch Revolt (1566-1609). Charles V’s successor as king of Spain, **Philip II** (r. 1557-98), was even more tyrannical than his father and less tolerant of Protestantism. Although the king of Spain, Philip had few ties to the Netherlands and little

sympathy for the independent spirit of the Dutch. Nonetheless, he determined to make the Netherlands submit to his authority. This in turn sparked a revolt in 1566, an uprising that marked the first phase of a protracted war between Dutch nationalists and Spain that would last for nearly 80 years – from 1566-1609 and again from 1621-48. Like the Thirty Years' War (see the following section), the various military campaigns and shifting alliances in the Dutch Wars of Independence were complex. Therefore, what follows is merely a very brief and general description.

The First Dutch Revolt began when a coalition of Dutch princes led by **William of Orange** (1533-84) organized resistance against Philip. (William was the great-grandfather of the aforementioned William of Orange, the future king of England.) William was an unlikely leader of the opposition as he lived a life of extravagant leisure and had a rather fluid relationship to religion – at various times identifying with Lutheran, Calvinism, and even the Catholic faith. But to his credit, William was committed to the principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience for all Dutch citizens. As an ardent patriot, he fought courageously, and at great personal risk, against Philip's Spanish mercenaries.

In 1566 protest riots erupted throughout the Low Countries as Protestant nationalists vandalized and destroyed Catholic churches and monasteries. The following year, Philip II responded by sending an invasion force of 10,000 troops under the **Duke of Alba** to punish the Dutch. The Spanish forces unleashed a reign of terror throughout the Low Countries that resulted in several thousand being imprisoned and executed, and even moderate Protestants who swore allegiance to King Philip II were persecuted. Once he had regained control, Philip II confiscated the property of Protestants, imposed punitive taxes on the populace, and eliminated the traditional independence of the various provinces. Many Protestants fled the Netherlands, and while in exile William of Orange continued to organize a resistance movement. Within the Low Countries, most of the opposition to the Spanish came from the northern provinces that were most heavily Calvinistic. In 1572 the Dutch opposition defeated a Spanish fleet and seized the northern ports of Holland and Zeeland, and in the aftermath, representatives of the northern provinces elected William as the commander of the rebel army. Over the next five years his forces took most of the key cities in the Low Countries.

Public opinion throughout many of the provinces swung decisively against the Spanish, especially after the sack of Antwerp when Spanish troops rampaged through the streets, pillaging the city and indiscriminately killing some 8,000 citizens. In the aftermath of the "**Spanish Fury**" all the provinces united to drive the Spanish out of the Low Countries.

However, the Spanish cause in the Netherlands was revived under the leadership of a new commander, the **Duke of Parma**. In 1578 the Duke landed with 20,000 fresh troops, and over several months he restored Spanish control over the southern provinces. Parma was a shrewd diplomat as well as a general, and he succeeded in driving a wedge between the Walloons of the south and the Dutch in the north. Capitalizing on traditional ethnic, religious and linguistic differences between the regions, he granted the southern provinces semi-independence in return for their allegiance to Spain and the Catholic Church. In response, in 1579 the northern provinces formed a military alliance, the **Union of Utrecht**.

In 1581 the legislative council of the northern provinces declared independence from Spain and formed the **United Provinces of the Dutch Republic**. In the process it established the "Evangelical Reformed Religion" as the official state church and banned all other faiths. But three years later, William of Orange was assassinated, and without his leadership Parma's Catholic forces were able to subdue one Dutch city after another. In desperation, the Dutch Republic appealed to **Queen Elizabeth** of England for assistance. The queen dispatched a force to aid the Dutch cause, but it was unsuccessful. In reaction to Elizabeth's intervention, Philip II prepared the **Spanish Armada** to invade England and overthrow her rule, but when the expedition set sail in 1588 it met with disaster.

In the aftermath of the Armada fiasco, the fortunes of the Dutch improved considerably. William's son, **Maurice of Nassau**, rallied the Dutch to strike back at the Catholic forces, and after Parma's death in 1592 the Protestant forces liberated many of the cities and towns under Spanish control. By 1600 the Dutch had constructed a series of fortifications that effectively blocked any further encroachments from the southern provinces, and the Dutch Republic was free to function as the first democratic government in modern European history. Furthermore, and despite opposition from the **Dutch Reformed Church**, religious freedom was granted to all non-Catholic sects.

In 1609 **Philip III**, the new King of Spain, accepted the status quo and negotiated an armistice, the **Twelve Years Truce**. The treaty divided the Low Countries between the Protestant Dutch provinces of the north and the Catholic provinces of the south (later called the **Spanish Netherlands, or Belgium**).

The Final Phase. However, in 1621 – in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War (see the following section) – hostilities once again resumed between Spain and the Dutch Republic. Under the leadership of William of Nassau’s younger brother, **Frederick Henry**, the Spanish were pushed farther south. Meanwhile, the Dutch navy more than held its own against the Spanish at sea. In 1628 the Dutch scored one of their greatest victories when they captured a Spanish fleet laden with silver from the Americas, which further enriched their war chest.

The Dutch wars of independence finally ended in 1648 with the **Peace of Westphalia** (see below). Under the terms of the agreement, Spain officially recognized the United Dutch Republic.

The Religious Resolution. Dutch Calvinists had played a crucial role in the wars with Spain, but they were never able to impose Calvinistic sacralism on the Netherlands. To his credit, Frederick Henry preferred a policy of religious tolerance, so while the Dutch Reformed Church was recognized as the established state religion, Arminians, Lutherans, Mennonites, and even Catholics were allowed to organize house churches without government interference. On the other hand, in the Spanish Netherlands (i.e., Belgium), authorities continued to suppress all non-Catholic religious groups.

THE THIRTY YEARS’ WAR (1618-48)

The Causes. Historians typically mark the end of the Reformation era to the mid-17th century and the **Congress of Westphalia** (1648) that ended the Thirty Years’ War. This was one of the most devastating wars in all of European history, and it was a major factor in the decline of European Christianity and the rise of modern secularism. Like the aforementioned Dutch Wars of Independence, the causes, the campaigns, and the shifting alliances during this prolonged conflict were complex and convoluted, as were the religious and political issues. It should also be emphasized that, although the Thirty Years’ War is remembered as the last of Europe’s great “religious wars,” in fact religion was only one of several factors that ignited the conflict. Like virtually all wars in human history, it was fought as much or more for personal, political, geographical and economic reasons. But especially in the beginning stages of the conflict, religious intolerance was a major factor.

A fundamental underlying premise of the Thirty Years’ War was **Christian sacralism** – the concept that church and state have a God-ordained mandate to co-rule society, and that all who live in a particular “Christian” state must be a particular type of “Christian.” But whereas the original concept of Constantianian sacralism was an empire-wide state religion, the 16th century version was enmeshed in a matrix of nationalistic rivalries. The operating assumption was that the ruler of an empire, a nation or a state – whether an emperor, a king or a local prince – had the authority to dictate the religious affiliation of his subjects. Religious liberty – even religious tolerance – was considered a vice, not a virtue, because it interfered with social uniformity.

As previously mentioned, in 1555 the **Peace of Augsburg** had ended nine years of intermittent warfare between German Lutherans and Catholics. In a compromise solution, the treaty allowed sovereign princes and independent cities to choose either Lutheranism or Catholicism, while subjects who were in the religious minority were permitted to emigrate freely. The treaty left Lutheranism entrenched in northern Germany and Catholicism dominant in the south, but it made no provisions for Reformed Christians or Anabaptists whose religious rights were ignored. Although the treaty provided a measure of peace that lasted for over 60 years, it was only a temporary and a shaky armistice as neither the papacy nor the Council of Trent (see above) were satisfied with the arrangement. In reality, more than anything else it was the prospects of an Ottoman Turkish

invasion of Central Europe that forestalled any intervening conflicts between Protestant and Catholic factions during this time. But once the Ottoman threat eased after 1606, relations between Germany's Catholics and Lutherans quickly deteriorated.

Tensions began to rise a decade before the outbreak of the war. This was especially the case in southern Germany where **Maximilian**, the Catholic duke of Bavaria, was concerned about the growing influence of Lutheran and Reformed Christianity. In response, he resolved to impose the "true faith" on these Protestant "heretics," which provoked a predictable reaction. As the two sides prepared for a resumption of armed conflict, rival religious alliances were organized. In 1608 German Lutherans formed the **Protestant** (or Evangelical) **Union** to defend against attacks by Catholics, while Catholics responded the following year with the **Catholic League**.

The Thirty Years' War was a protracted series of military campaigns that eventually engulfed much of Europe, although most of the fighting centered in and around Germany. At various times the war involved and impacted the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, Portugal, France, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, and Poland. For a time English and Scottish troops intervened on the side of Danish Lutherans, and early on even the Ottoman Turks were engaged in the conflict. The war also contributed to other unrelated hostilities such as the Smolensk War between Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The issues that precipitated the conflict began in Protestant Bohemia in 1617 when **Ferdinand of Styria** was elected Crown Prince of Bohemia and Hungary. Having been educated by Jesuits, Ferdinand was a militant Catholic who was committed to imposing religious conformity throughout his realm. When the king sent two Catholic councillors as his representatives to Prague in May 1618, members of the Protestant assembly literally threw them out of the palace window. This event, known as the "Defenestration of Prague," sparked the revolt that led to a major armed insurrection. The following year Ferdinand was elected the Holy Roman Emperor, but Bohemian nobles rejected his rule and offered the kingship to **Frederick V of the Palatinate**. In response, Ferdinand enlisted the support of his Habsburg nephew, **King Philip IV** of Spain, to assist in crushing the revolt.

Although the war was characterized by religious rivalries, it quickly became enmeshed in the byzantine world of Euro-politics. As a result, it unleashed a series of interlocking and overlapping with both sides



Emperor Ferdinand II of the Holy Roman Empire

recruiting and deploying private mercenary armies. In the same way that "politics makes strange bed-fellows," so does war. Early on, the Ottoman Turks supported Protestant insurrections in Hungary and Bohemia, and Muslim armies even launched an invasion of Catholic Poland.

In addition, the war became a ferocious struggle for European hegemony that pitted the Catholic Hapsburgs of Spain and Austria against their main rivals, the Catholic Bourbon monarchs of France. Periodically, French Catholic forces formed alliances with Protestant armies from Denmark and Sweden in order to seize key territory such as Flanders and Alsace from their Catholic rivals, while at the same time they subdued the last bastions of Huguenot resistance within France. French intervention expanded and prolonged the war and was a major factor in much of the death and carnage until, eventually, the conflict descended into a Catholic intramural war of domination as the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs strove for supremacy.

As the competing armies campaigned throughout Europe, any restrictions and concessions based on traditional Augustinian "Just War" principles and ethics were ignored. Self-serving political leaders and mercenary commanders switched sides at will to further their own agendas as alliances were forged and broken. So although the war is often portrayed as a religious struggle between Protestants and Catholics, in reality the coalitions of forces transcended religious boundaries.

The Extent of the War. The Thirty Years' War fractured the fragile status quo that had been in effect for over 60 years since the Peace of Augsburg. During the course of the conflict, Protestant cities such as Magdeburg and Augsburg were captured by Catholic armies, tens of thousands were massacred, and the survivors forced to reconvert to Catholicism. Protestant atrocities were equally abominable.

The war wreaked horrible death and devastation as marauding armies lived off the land and pillaged the countryside. In the process, entire towns and villages were wiped out by rampaging armies and bands of mercenaries, although disease and starvation killed off far more than the actual fighting. In the midst of all the suffering, desperate peasants revolted and looted monasteries and the castles of local nobles. Some areas, of course, were hit harder than others. Historians

estimate that in Germany the overall population declined by as much as 25-40%, including perhaps half the adult male population. Swedish armies alone destroyed as many as 2,000 castles, 18,000 villages and 1500 towns throughout Germany. Bohemia was also devastated and lost about one-third of its population due to war, famine, disease, and the mass expulsion of Protestant Czechs. In Spain, about one-fourth of the population of Castile was wiped out, while large sections of France were left depopulated. The bubonic plague also ravaged large sections of Europe, particularly the northern regions of Italy.

As crop failures, famines and epidemics killed off millions, many attributed the disasters to supernatural causes, leading to a major outbreak of witchcraft trials and executions. For example, between 1626-30 more than 200 men, women and children were burned at the stake in Catholic-controlled Wurzburg while another 900 were put to death in the surrounding area. In nearby Bamberg a special “witch house” was erected with a torture chamber featuring Bible verses covering the walls. Over a five-year period between 300-600 were condemned and burned in the city – everyone from common peasants to the mayor.

Not since the 5th century and the fall of the Western Roman Empire had Europe suffered on this scale. As historian David Goldman notes, “This was the definitive disaster in modern European history.” In fact, on a proportional scale, the Thirty Years’ War was far more destructive than World War II. In *Grey Eminence: A Study in Religion and Politics*, Aldous Huxley commented on the extent of the misery:

[E]xecuted malefactors were cut down from the gibbets to serve as butchers’s meat, and the recently bereaved were forced to guard the cemeteries against the ghoulish activities of body-snatchers”....

After [the 1634 Battle of] Nordlingen, many thousands of the defeated Protestants’ camp-followers went wandering in great troops, like foraging baboons, desperately looking for something to eat. Unprotected villages were overrun and looted; the larger towns closed their gates and sent out troops of soldiers to drive them away. Strasburg left its gates open, and thirty thousand of the almost sub-human creatures entered the town and, having exhausted the charity of the burghers, began to die by hundreds in the streets. Thereupon the city fathers had the survivors herded out at the point of the pike to die in the country. [*Grey Eminence* (Chatto and Windus, 1942), p. 213. Quoted in Goldman, *How Civilizations Die*, p. 158.]

The Congress of Westphalia (1648). The Congress of Westphalia, Europe’s first great peace conference, finally brought much of the death and destruction to an end. In terms of its impact on religious toleration, the main effects were that Switzerland and the Dutch Republic were recognized as autonomous and independent states, and in northern Germany princes could now choose to establish either Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Reformed Christianity as the official state religion within their realm. (However, Anabaptism remained illegal and unprotected in most areas.) At the outset of the 1600s nearly half of the European landmass had been under the control of Protestant governments, but by the end of the century it was only about 20%. The greatest losses came in central and southeast Europe as a result of the Habsburg victories early in the Thirty Years’ War.

Furthermore, not all religious violence and persecution ended with the Treaty of Westphalia. Over the next 30 years the ancient Waldensian communities of Italian Protestants were virtually exterminated with thousands being massacred in the process. In France, **Louis XIV** (r. 1643-1715) continued to harass and pressure the Huguenots within his realm. In 1685 he finally took decisive action by revoking the **Edict of Nantes**, thereby forcing them either to reconvert to Catholicism or else emigrate.

POST-SCRIPT:

The Butcher’s Bill. The century-and-a-quarter between the outbreak of the German Peasants’ Revolt (1524-25) to the end of the Thirty Years’ War (1648) and the English Civil War (1651) was one of the bloodiest and most destructive periods in European history. Although generally regarded as the era of Europe’s great “wars of religion,” as noted above, religion was only one factor. Like most armed conflicts, these wars were fought primarily for territory, for access to raw materials, to conquer, control and exploit other people, and for personal reasons. But a contributing factor was often the attempt to exterminate “heretics” – be they Protestants, Catholics, Anabaptists, Waldensians, or any other sect.

Cumulatively, these wars had catastrophic effects on much of Europe. Although estimates by historians vary widely, at least 8-18 million people perished in these horrifying campaigns as summarized in the following tables:

Europe's Religious Wars: 1524-1651 The Butcher's Bill

	Estimated War Dead
German Peasants' Revolt (1524-25)	100,000
Schmalkaldic Wars (1546-47; 1552-54)	?
Huguenot Wars in France (1562-98)	2 million - 4 million
Dutch Wars of Independence (1566-1648)	230,000 - 2 million
Thirty Years' War (1618-48)	4 million - 11 million
English Civil War and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1639-51)	875,000
Persecutions of Anabaptists	5,000 - 10,000
Persecutions of Waldensians	?
Estimated Total:	8 million - 18 million

European Population: 1500-1650 (in millions)

	1500	1550	1600	1650	Increase
England	2.3	3.1	4.2	5.5	+ 2.4
Scotland	.8	.9	1.0	1.0	+ 1.25
Ireland	.8	.9	1.0	1.5	+ 1.87
Scandinavia	1.5	1.7	2.0	2.6	+ 1.75
Portugal	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.2	+ 1.2
Spain	6.8	7.4	8.1	7.1	+ 1.04
France	16.4	19.0	20.0	20.5	+ 1.2
Switzerland	.6	.75	.9	1.0	+ 1.67
Italy	10.5	11.4	13.1	11.3	+ 1.08
Belgium	1.25	1.65	1.3	1.75	+ 1.4
Netherlands	.95	1.25	1.5	1.9	+ 2.0
Germany	12.0	14.0	16.0	12.0	0
Austria-Bohemia	3.5	3.6	4.3	4.1	+ 1.17
Poland	2.5	3.0	3.4	3.0	+ 1.2
TOTAL	60.9	68.85	77.9	74.45	+ 1.22

Source: Jan de Vries, "Population" in Thomas A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600* (Brill, 1994), p. 13.

PART 3: A BLOODY AND BITTER LEGACY

From Sacralism to Secularism. There is much in Christian history, including much related to the Protestant Reformation, that is positive and truly inspiring. Conversely, there is also a dark side that should be acknowledged and understood.

In retrospect, four major developments resulted from the Reformation era wars.

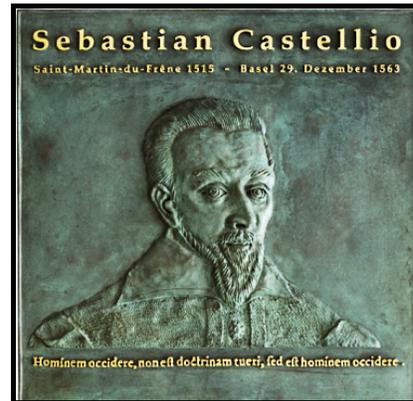
(1) Religious Tolerance. To say the least, Christians have not always lived consistently faithful to the moral and ethical mandates of the gospel, and Christian institutions have too often incorporated the values of this fallen and corrupt world.

Until modern times relatively few Christians viewed freedom of conscience and religious liberty as virtues. From the time the Christian faith became the favored religion under Constantine, the tendency of many church leaders was to utilize the power of the state to coerce non-believers into adhering to Christian beliefs and practices. Once Christianity became the official established religion of the Roman Empire, this same mentality was applied to nonconformist “heretics,” “apostates,” and “schismatics,” who were regarded as unworthy of respect or even tolerance. This was an integral aspect of Christendom and Christian sacralism – the alliance of church and state – and within a generation after Constantine all churches except those officially sanctioned by the government, working in collusion with the Roman Church, were not merely anathematized and excommunicated but often persecuted out of existence.

Throughout medieval history and into the Reformation era this same sacralistic mentality characterized both the Roman Catholic and the mainline Protestant churches. With the exception of radical dissident groups such as the Continental Anabaptists, the English Quakers, and the Baptists in colonial America, religious liberty – or even religious tolerance – was regarded not as a virtue but a vice. Tolerance legalized heresy, and to tolerate religious dissidents was to destroy the unity not only in the Church but in society as a whole. In effect, tolerance posed a threat to all social and civil order. Just as all subjects of a kingdom or empire had a moral and spiritual duty to swear allegiance to their political authority, surely there should be only one spiritual authority – the duly established state church.

[Note: In fact, a few Protestant reformers did advocate tolerance – most notably the French scholar

and theologian **Sabastian Castellio** (1515-63), who for several years was an associate of John Calvin in Geneva. In the wake of the execution of Miguel Servetus on charges of heresy, Castellio wrote “Should Heretics Be Persecuted?” (1553), arguing that Christians should respect religious freedom and show compassion, mercy and tolerance toward those who



hold diverse views, even quoting Calvin’s own words from several years earlier when the reformer himself was being persecuted by the Catholic Church: “It is unchristian to use arms against those

who have been expelled from the Church, and to deny them rights common to all mankind.” Surprisingly, even Martin Luther was uncharacteristically ambivalent about executing heretics, but for the most part Protestants and Catholics alike accepted religious repression as a necessary expediency to preserve the true faith.]

Augustine’s “Just War” theory aside, Reformation-era religious wars were as brutal as any ever fought. Although fought in the *name* of Christ, these wars were certainly not waged in the *spirit* of Christ. Both sides were guilty of unspeakable atrocities and the desecration of their opponents’ most sacred sites. Gradually, these bloody and destructive wars shattered the traditional sacralistic mindset. Due to the fact that religious beliefs could not be dictated or controlled by state or church authorities, the realization gradually emerged that religious tolerance was not only preferable but the only feasible solution to what was a perennial and intractable problem.

Eventually, after more than a century of theological wrangling, doctrinal hair-splitting, religious persecution and savage religious wars, many Europeans grew increasingly cynical toward authoritarian religion. In 1648 the **Treaty of Westphalia** ended much of the carnage and bloodshed. In the process, the treaty also grudgingly provided a measure of religious tolerance. Since neither side could exterminate the other, both were forced to accept the principle of peaceful coexistence, as the historian Charles Freeman notes: “It was from sheer exhaustion and horror at the atrocities and counter-atrocities that by 1648, Europeans... had to

accept that the Almighty, for whatever reason, refused to signal which church teaches the true faith.” Diarmaid MacCulloch concurs, noting:

[T]he most significant contribution of the two Reformation centuries to Christianity was the theory and practice of toleration, although it would be possible to argue that the contribution was inadvertent and reluctant. Christianity’s previous record on toleration... might kindly be termed as unimpressive.... [The attitude toward tolerance gradually began to change in the Reformation] through force of circumstances, as the rival bidders for monopoly the expression of Christianity found that they could not impose that monopoly. [*The Reformation* (Viking-Penguin, 2003, pp. 652, 653.)]

Similarly, Rudolph Heinze comments on the irony of this development:

Ironically, the religious wars played a major role in bringing about a degree of toleration, since neither party was able to annihilate the other, and the participants emerged from these lengthy wars too exhausted to continue trying to achieve religious unity by the suppression of the opposition. [*Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion* (BakerBooks, 2005), p. 377]

This was the religious legacy that Americans inherited, and it accounts for much of the principled and resolute anti-sacralism of the Founding Fathers and their commitment to religious liberty. As James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay observed in *The Federalist Papers*, religion had often been a divisive and disruptive force in society, and Christian sacralism had left a long and bloody trail of bigotry, repression and violence. As Hamilton noted, “Heresies can rarely be cured by persecution.” The solution, however, was not in the creation of an anti-religious secular system (such as would later characterize the French Revolution) but rather a proper and prudent separation of the institutions of church and state. To their credit, the Founding Fathers crafted a resolution that subsequently allowed for the implantation and flourishing of a uniquely American manifestation of the principle of religious liberty.

(2) Religious Fragmentation. In the early 1520s Catholic officials warned that if the Lutheran movement succeeded, it would be only the beginning of the fragmentation of the Christian church. Once begun, there would be no end. In fact, Luther took this charge seriously and was much troubled by it as Scripture is clear and unequivocal that there be unity within the spiritual Body of Christ.

- In Jesus’ last charge to his disciples prior to his arrest and crucifixion, he prayed for their unity: “[T]hat all of them may be one, Father, just as

you are in me and I am in you.... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” – John 17:21ff.

- In I Cor. 1:10 the apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthian Christians for divisions in the church based on different members’ preferences for one apostle or another: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and heart.”
- Other passages emphasize this same theme:
 - Rom. 15: 5-6 – “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - Eph. 4:3-5 – “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all....”

Nonetheless, Luther was convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was apostate and the souls of men were at stake. Therefore, he concluded that truth trumps unity, and schism is preferable to heresy.

Predictably, the divisions in Christianity did not end with the Lutheran movement. At the **Marburg Colloquy** in 1529, Luther and the Swiss reformer **Huldrych Zwingli** clashed over opposing views on communion (the “Sacramentarian Controversy”). For Luther, there could be no formal alliance without complete doctrinal unity – on his terms, of course. In



lieu of any established human authority, both sides appealed to Scripture but disagreed on what it taught. Their failure to unite their movements resulted in the first schism among the Reformers.

[Note: Twenty-five years later Sebastian Castellio proposed a solution to this conundrum in his book, *The Heretics* (1554), in which he argued for a kind of lowest-common-denominator “mere Christianity.” According to Castellio, all that Christians must agree upon was (1) the love and goodness of God, and (2) the

atonement death of Jesus Christ. In his mind, all else was negotiable. To say the least, most Protestant leaders were not impressed. In response, Theodore Beza argued that tolerance was a vice, not a virtue, and a formula for civil and religious anarchy.]

With their failure to unite, Luther and Zwingli shared mutual responsibility for founding the first denominational division within Protestantism. They also failed to present a strong united front, which the staunch Catholic and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V effectively exploited against them. Then in short order other independent reform movements erupted that further splintered the unity in European Christianity.

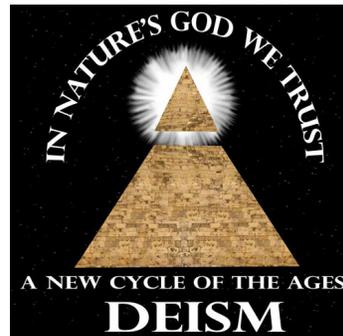
History and the recognition of the realities of human nature teach us that liberty is a mixed bag: It allows people the opportunity to be as good as possible, but it also sanctions the full expression of all the innate egoism, jealousy, rivalry and competition that is part of our nature. Today, there are reportedly thousands of different denominations, “fellowships” and “associations” that fragment the Body of Christ. This should be a source of great embarrassment. After all, in his last instructions to his disciples, Jesus prayed that they offer a unified witness for him in the midst of this spiritually dark and dysfunctional world (John 17:21).

(3) Rationalism. In the wake of the religious wars many intellectuals, repulsed by all the bigotry and bloodshed that resulted from the endless (and sometimes trivial) disputes over theological and ecclesiastical controversies, came to reject traditional theology altogether. In the beginning, Catholic mysticism and superstitions such as transubstantiation were challenged by Protestant intellectuals who emphasized Scripture and reason in their critique of Catholicism. Soon, though, religious skeptics would use the same arguments leveled against Catholic superstitions to challenge the faith-based tenets of the Christian faith in general. Doctrines such as the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and even the supernatural inspiration of the Bible itself were subjected to rigorous critique. Rationalism, then, became the connecting link between what many regarded as religious gullibility and secular skepticism.

Like many heretical notions, rationalism began innocently enough in the early 17th century among Dutch “Collegiants” who rejected all of the fanaticism and unwarranted dogmatism of the Reformation era. Like Schwenckfelders and earlier spiritualists (and later Quakers), Collegiant Christians emphasized the doctrine of the Inner Light. But as time went on the tendency was to focus on the light of reason rather than the illumination via the indwelling presence of the

Holy Spirit. Hence, in 1684 the Collegiant writer Jan Bredenburg of Rotterdam would proclaim that “Reason, which takes its origin from the eternal being, offers men eternal truth and is the light... and the guiding star of all human practice.”* Far from being consciously heretical, in his mind Bredenburg was simply offering up a more rational approach to the Christian faith.

In the following century many of the most influential Enlightenment *philosophes* would launch more direct assaults on historic Christianity. Claiming to be men of reason and opponents of ignorance and superstition, they were skeptical of all claims to the miraculous, including those found in Scripture. Because much of the Reformation era conflict came over contrasting interpretations of Scripture, many began to argue for a more generic natural religion – a kind of lowest-common-denominator faith that acknowledged a Supreme Being but otherwise minimized theological specifics. It was this orientation that set the stage for the emergence of 18th century **deism**, which functioned as the transitional belief



system between biblical theism and the secularism to come. Initially, deistic concepts were integrated into a watered-down “liberal Christianity” that later came to characterize Unitarianism and Universalism.

(4) Secularism. At the outset, the various Reformation movements were based on a simple, and flawed, premise:

- If the common people could be liberated from Catholic repression and superstition; and
- If they could read the Bible for themselves and therefore understand what God expected of them; then...
- They would be spiritually enlightened, their lives would be transformed, and civil society would become the kind of righteous community that God intended it to be.

Unfortunately, as everyone from Luther to modern scholars have noted, this was naive and far too optimistic. Rudolph Heinz puts it this way:

If it was the objective of the Reformation to complete the breaking up of the medieval church, it certainly

* Quoted in Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, p. 673.

succeeded. If its goal was to rationalize ecclesiastical administration... it definitely succeeded But if it was its central purpose to make people – all people – think, feel and act as Christians, to imbue them with a Christian mind-set, motivational drive and way of life, it failed. [Ibid., p. 401]

The Anabaptist critique of the Reformation was that it was a half-way revolution that didn't go far enough. Fortunately and importantly, some core Christian doctrines were recovered – e.g., *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*. Many non-biblical doctrinal accretions were discarded such as purgatory, transubstantiation, indulgences, the professional priesthood, and the various doctrines related to the veneration of Mary. Much of the scandal and corruption inherent in the medieval religious order was eliminated. Also, Reformation churches were not so formalistic and hierarchical, which made them generally more responsive to the needs of their congregants. However, mainline Protestantism still retained Christian sacralism, which involved the church in the affairs of state and implicated the church in all the injustices perpetrated by the state. Also, by its very nature sacralism engendered a kind of nominal, superficial Christianity that mitigated the church's ability to offer up a prophetic critique of government, society and culture.

Some mainline Protestant reformers acknowledged this problem. For example, although Luther rejected much of church tradition and the clerical hierarchy of popes, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, he was in no way an individualist. He believed in the concept of a “mother church,” and he argued that the Christian life must be lived out in the context of a church community of true believers. Nonetheless, he was torn between his sacralistic impulses and the realization that state-sponsored institutional churches, including his own Evangelical Church, was not the true spiritual church of Christ. Reluctantly, he conceded that within the institutional (visible) church is the true (invisible) church of committed believers – the church within the church. In his words, “The true church is hidden, [and] the number of saints unknown.”

Ironically, the Reformers failed to realize that if Christendom was fractured, the result might be *not more* religious devotion *but less*. As Heinze observes, “The Reformation opened the door to other changes that would eventually produce modern society. One prime example is the growth of skepticism” – which in turn set the stage for the Enlightenment and the secularization of society.

Since Christians had never reached an interpretive consensus on the Bible (and in fact seemed incapable of doing so), why not simply trust one's own God-given rationality? In the minds of many, the more sensible course of action was to put one's trust in human reason – an orientation that was compatible with Enlightenment philosophy.

With the Peace of Westphalia, a reevaluation of the connection between church and state ensued that eventually would lead to the disestablishment of state churches and, ultimately, culminate in the secularization of modern Europe – a process that was, in effect, the inevitable result of two processes:

- (1) The inherent egoistic and sinful nature of man – as C. S. Lewis put it in *Mere Christianity*: “fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his arms;” and
- (2) Christians behaving badly.

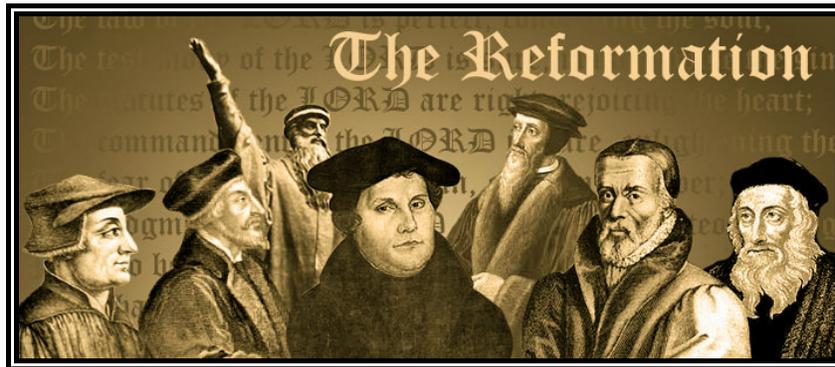
As David Goldman comments in *How Civilizations Die*, the wonder is that it took so long for secularism to eventually triumph:

We should be surprised not by the disappearance of Christianity in Europe, but by its tenacity. For centuries Christianity was burned, tortured, and starved out of the European peoples. It is a testimony to the tenacity of their faith that it took so long to kill. [*How Civilizations Die* (Regnery Publishing, 2011), p. 160.]

Similarly, the English Civil War and its aftermath had a profoundly negative impact on Christianity in the British Isles. The war itself was one of the bloodiest in all of English history as an estimated 7% of the entire adult male population were killed – a higher percentage than died in World War I. In Ireland, the situation was far worse as nearly 30% of the population – more than 600,000 souls – perished in the conflict. Furthermore, the hatred engendered by the war undermined the credibility of Christianity in England just as it did on the Continent during the Thirty Years' War. Oliver Cromwell's well-meaning but counterproductive attempt to create a Puritan commonwealth had exactly the opposite effect than he intended. His efforts to impose biblical moral values and behavior on an entire nation failed miserably and left a bitter legacy. As a result, over the next century there was a general turning away from the Christianity with the ascendance of Enlightenment rationalism, deism, Unitarianism, and the gradual proliferation of secular values. Eventually, the English nation embraced religious toleration, but largely because Christianity had been so discredited.

Generations of religious bigotry and bloodshed undermined the credibility and the appeal of Christianity in both Europe and England, and the sober truth is that religious liberty was eventually accepted not so much because of a new understanding of Christian social ethics as for two practical reasons: First, no single Christian faction could decisively eliminate its rivals; and second, secularism neutralized religious beliefs and passions to the point that most people no longer *cared* about doctrinal and denominational issues as they had in the past.

The Summa. In summary, was the Protestant Reformation necessary? For those who value the credibility of the Christian faith and the freedom to proclaim the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ, the answer must be a resounding “Yes.” Nonetheless, we understand that history is complicated and often messy because God uses very fallible human beings to ultimately accomplish his will and purpose. The Reformation is a classic case-in-point: a bloody and bitter period in Western history that liberated large segments of Christianity from bondage to a corrupt and apostate Church. As Christians, we should cherish unity and actively pursue it. But we must also be cognizant of the fact that truth supercedes unity.



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