CHAPTER 14

Reform in the Western Church, 1490–1570

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. The Context of Church Reform, 1494–1517
   A. Growing Discontent in the Western Church
      1. The papacy experienced a decline in prestige; lack of spiritual leadership convinced many that the papacy had become corrupt and worldly.
      2. Hope for a spiritual leader was fueled by Christian humanism, emphasizing the need to recover pure Christianity by turning to the Bible and ancient church fathers.
      3. Laymen joined clergy to form the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life; they had an intense personal devotion to Jesus.
      4. In the absence of strong papal leadership, rulers in Europe tried to meet their subjects’ religious needs while strengthening their control over the church.
      5. The printing press made it possible for church reformers to spread their views.
   B. God’s Wrath and Church Reform
      1. The Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola denounced corruption in Florence and in the church, emphasizing God’s wrath by organizing “burnings of vanities,” public bonfires where people burned clothes, jewels, and pornography.
      2. Savonarola prophesized correctly that the French would invade Italy (1494), but when he then attacked Pope Alexander VI’s sexual immorality and tried to bring back the conciliar movement’s check on papal power, the pope had him condemned, tortured, and burned at the stake in 1498.
   C. Humanism and Church Reform
      1. Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (d. 1536), the greatest Christian humanist of his generation, was a scholar independent of the monastery and the university, who chose to remain Catholic.
      2. Erasmus supported a “Philosophy of Christ,” the call for Christians to return to their ancient roots (Christ’s life and the church fathers) for standards of belief and action, leading to his (and Protestants) rejecting later traditions such as confession to a priest and clerical celibacy as not essential to Christianity.
      3. Erasmus also had faith in the power of education to make a better world and maintained contacts with other influential humanists such as Thomas More, author of *Utopia*.

II. Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, 1517–1550
   A. Luther’s Challenge to the Church
      1. Luther, a monk, was professor of New Testament studies at the new University of Wittenberg.
      2. Luther believed that justification (righteousness before God) was only available through grace (God’s help), never through good works (human action), and so indulgences were a waste of time and a sign of papal corruption.
      3. Martin Luther founded Protestant reform in 1517 in Ninety-five Theses that questioned the selling of indulgences by Johannes Tetzel, who promised “When the coin in the change box rings, the soul from Purgatory springs!”
   B. The Impact of Luther’s Challenge
1. In 1518, the pope condemned Luther as a heretic, and in 1521, Charles V at the Imperial Diet in the city of Worms declared him an outlaw when Luther refused to renounce his teachings, arguing scripture alone was the only authority he would obey.

2. Luther was not burned as a heretic (like Jan Hus) because he had widespread sympathy within the empire, including the local ruler of Wittenberg, who protected him.

3. Luther reformed Christianity by recognizing only two sacraments (baptism and communion) instead of the seven Catholic ones, arguing the priesthood of all believers, translating the Bible into German using Erasmus’s Greek version, and composing hymns such as “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

C. The Spread of Reform
1. Urban reformers attacked the privileges of the Catholic clergy and believed that community life should be regulated by pure gospel, stressing the equality of all Christians.

2. Huldrych Zwingli, in the Swiss city of Zurich, went beyond Luther when he banished images of Christ and argued that the bread and wine of Communion were not the body and blood of Christ but simple memorials to the Last Supper.

3. During the Peasants’ War (1525), peasants earned Luther’s wrath and an imperial army massacre by invoking the pure gospel to argue that payments to landlords be lowered, serfdom be abolished, and they be granted greater access to common lands.

4. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) allowed the rulers of each imperial state to determine whether the state would be Lutheran or Catholic, permanently shattering the religious unity of Germany.

III. The Protestant Reformation Across Europe, 1520–1570
A. The Anabaptists and Radical Reform
1. The Protestant radicals thought Luther had not gone far enough.

2. Anabaptists believed that every Christian was capable of correctly interpreting scripture, argued for a sharp separation of church and state, and abolished infant baptism in favor of an adult and voluntary baptism.

3. To suppress the Anabaptists, Charles V issued an imperial edict in 1529 decreeing the death penalty for anyone who held a separatist view of church-state relations.

4. In Münster, Anabaptists pooled all real estate as common property, banned money, unlocked house doors, and practiced polygamy before alarmed Catholic and Lutheran rulers slaughtered almost all Münster’s inhabitants in a bloodbath (1535).

5. Pacifist groups of Anabaptists survived in the Hutterites and the Mennonites, whose descendents make up the Amish and Mennonite communities in parts of North America today.

B. John Calvin and Calvinism
1. In 1536, Calvin published the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which outlined his theology.
   a) Scripture was the only source of authority for Christians.
   b) Clergy should teach and administer discipline to the community.
   c) The church alone should appoint clergy.
   d) He believed in double predestination, arguing that only the hard-working and thrifty “elect” (1 percent of church members) would be saved, while the rest were damned to hell.

2. Calvin’s base was Geneva, where he lived from 1541. He was able to take over its government in 1555, forming the Consistory (a watchful, theocratic government) and founding the Genevan Academy to train Calvinist clergy.

C. The Spread of Calvinism
1. Calvinism became the most dynamic Protestant movement, spreading throughout Europe.
2. By 1560, about 10 percent of the French population was Huguenot (French Calvinists), while 50 percent of the nobility had embraced the new faith.

3. In the Netherlands, Charles V fiercely resisted Protestantism, but Calvinist missionaries established secret communities. Like France, the Netherlands was moving toward civil war between Protestants and Catholics.

4. John Knox, returning from Geneva in 1558, successfully introduced Calvin theology into his native Scotland and created a Presbyterian form of church administration that eliminated bishops.

D. Reform in England

1. In 1521, King Henry VIII condemned Lutheranism and the pope titled him Defender of the Faith; twelve years later, he was excommunicated by the pope for divorcing Catherine of Aragon and marrying Anne Boleyn.

2. In the Act of Supremacy, Henry proclaimed himself “the only supreme head on earth of the church of England,” a title still held by British monarchs.

3. Henry’s rift with the pope resulted in radical reform, in which he abolished English monasteries and confiscated their lands.

4. After Edward VI’s Protestant Book of Common Prayer and Bloody Mary’s executions of Protestants, Elizabeth I issued the moderate Thirty-nine Articles (1571), defining a middle ground for Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism.

IV. Catholic Reform, 1500–1570

A. Reform by Religious Orders

1. All the reforms aimed to increase Catholics’ commitment to the moral and spiritual teachings of the church.

2. Theresa of Ávila’s reformed Carmelites set the tone for women’s orders: separation from the world and a rigorous life of prayer.

3. The largest reformed male order, the Capuchins (a branch of the Franciscans), took strict vows of poverty and preached sermons urging Catholics to live in accordance with Jesus’s teachings.

4. The most dynamic new religious order was the Jesuits (Society of Jesus), founded by Ignatius of Loyola.
   a) He formulated the Spiritual Exercises to strengthen one’s will to fight for Christ, which involved meditation.
   b) In 1540, the pope officially recognized the Jesuits.
   c) Their most successful service was in education, founding secondary schools throughout the Catholic world.

B. Reform in the Papacy

1. Paul III appointed a special commission to evaluate papal administration; the secret report, issued in 1537, argued that church corruption was caused mainly by abuses of papal power.

2. Paul began appointing reformers to the College of Cardinals and in 1542, he established the Roman Inquisition, investigating and punishing heretics.

3. In 1549, The Index of Prohibited Books was set up, listing works Catholics were forbidden to read.

4. Paul convened the Council of Trent (three sessions, 1545 to 1563) that reaffirmed Catholic teaching (for example, indulgences, the seven traditional sacraments, and clergy/laity division) and set up seminaries—moves that further divided Catholics and Protestants.

C. Catholic Missions Overseas

1. To make up for followers lost in Europe to Protestantism, Catholics sent missionaries overseas to the Americas and East Asia.
2. In the Americas, Spanish missionaries debated over how to convert the local people, but they agreed that the process of conversion should be in European hands.

3. Local peoples reacted to the missionaries in various ways, including resisting any changes in traditional culture, converting to Christianity and European customs, and creating a new religious identity that combined aspects of Catholicism and European culture with their older beliefs and practices.

4. In Asia, Portuguese missionaries, such as Francis Xavier, spread Catholicism in India and Japan. The Jesuits established a Christian community in Japan, but quarrels between the Portuguese and Spanish missionaries caused the Japanese government to suppress Christianity in 1616.

5. Matteo Ricci, founder of the Chinese mission, had a small influence in China, but he was considerably influential in Europe, providing new information about Chinese culture, philosophy, and history.

V. Reformation and Society

A. Educating the Young

1. Protestant reformers argued for educational reform, believing that good Christians should know how to read the Bible. In 1529, Luther published a *Small Catechism* and in 1545, Calvin published his *Geneva Catechism*.

2. Catholic reformers sometimes endorsed education, teaching members to recite the Lord’s Prayer, the creeds, and the Hail Mary, as published in a new *Roman Catechism* (1566).

3. Both Protestant and Catholic education efforts focused on boys, with girls’ education being limited to training for household activities.

4. The Piarists established a primary school for poor boys.

5. Reforms in elementary education and the availability of printed reading material hastened the spread of literacy.

B. Poor Relief

1. In 1522, Luther outlawed public begging and mandated that poor relief was to be turned over to the city government. Only those indicated as deserving would receive help, restricting aid to those unable to work due to age, disability, or sickness.

2. Catholic reformers agreed with Luther, but they created a variety of systems for poor relief; state authorities administered some funds, religious confraternities collected and distributed others, and private individuals continued to give.

3. Calvin believed that the state should tax the rich for the benefit of the poor; he believed that if there was poverty, it was because the community as a whole had sinned.

C. Family Life

1. Luther abolished celibate religious orders; married ex-nun Katherine von Bora to show that Protestant marriage was for all men and women, including clergy; allowed divorce; and ordered the closure of brothels.

2. Both Protestants and Catholics began to see the purpose of marriage as more than an outlet for sexual impulses and the production of offspring.

3. Women’s religious options were greater for Catholics than for Protestants, through invoking special female saints and forming religious orders.

D. Jews in the Age of the Reformation

1. Rulers of Lutheran states ordered the expulsion of Jews, and Calvin endorsed the medieval idea of Jews as “Christ killers.”

2. In 1516, Venice established an area for Jews called the Ghetto.

3. In 1593, the pope placed severe restrictions on Jews.

   a) They were forbidden to sell meat or unleavened bread to Christians.

   b) They could not bathe with Christians or employ them as servants.

   c) Legal cases were transferred from Jewish law courts to state law courts.
d) They could not be physicians to non-Jews, and their economic activity was confined to the secondhand clothes trade.

e) They were forced to wear yellow badges.