

REFORMATION AND COUNTER-REFORMATION MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE

Reformation is another historical development, that marked the beginning of modern age in European history, It can be defined as a revolt not only against the dominance of Roman Catholic Church over almost all walks of the life of the people, but against the evils of the Church as well. It manifested itself in two developments - **The Protestant Revolution**, which resulted in a split in Christianity and **the Counter Reformation** that affected certain reforms within the Roman Catholic Church. It was not merely a religious movement, but had its social and political underpinnings.

Reasons for Reformation

To start with, during the middle ages, the Roman Catholic Church had become the largest, wealthiest and most influential institution. Its head, the Pope even, exercised political power and it was said that he was the maker and unmaker of rulers. Instead of living a simple and catholic life, he lived in luxury, kept standing armies and he could make wars and peace. On the heels of the Pope, the clergy also imitated him and there was rampant degeneration among them. Priesthood had become an attractive profession to amass wealth and power. Even the appointment of the clergy was through corrupt means and corruption had become the order of the day. Immorality among the clergy was not an issue during the medieval period, where blind faith replaced all other principles.

With regard to the Roman Catholic Church, it was the biggest land owner in Western Europe. As per the then existing laws and traditions, Church properties were exempted from taxation, hence the burden of taxation fell on the shoulders of common people. Naturally people rose against the Church. To make matters worse, the Church squeezed large amount of money through various means. For example, Peter's Penance, Tithe and Annates were some of such taxes. It also collected funds from people in the name of constructing cathedrals or

repair old ones. There were fraud practices to sell Christian antiques or relics, though not genuine or original to amass huge sums of money. Further, a new fraud practice, namely the Sale of Indulgences, which, it was believed that the purchase would free a believer from all sins and granted remission of punishment, also crept in the Church. The existence of Inquisition to punish the heretics was set up. Moreover, those who oppose these practices were brutally punished without any justification.

These long years of exploitation and brutality, in course of time, began to be questioned at the end of the medieval period. This resulted in the emergence of Protestant Reformation.

Renaissance laid the foundation for the Reformation. The ideas and the new outlook that the Renaissance generated, acted as catalysts. Again, the rise of regional languages as the languages of literature and the consequent emergence of national consciousness among the people and the resultant Nation States played a pivotal role in the emergence of the Reformation. In the newly risen Nation States, powerful and absolute monarchs took the reins of administration. These rulers disliked papal interference, encouraged the people who rebel against the Church and questioned the orders of the Pope in non-religious matters.

It was in this context that these monarchs got the immense support of the newly emerged middle class, who stood for a stable government and a peaceful atmosphere, of law and order. These middle class opposed the Church restrictions on business and it vehemently against the Church. Thus the role of the capitalist class cannot be undermined in the emergence of Reformation.

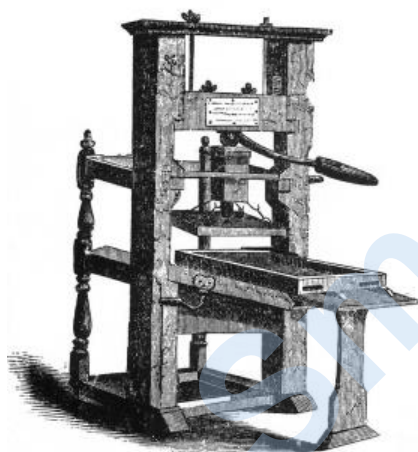
As already noted, Renaissance had made lasting impact on the people by inculcating the spirit of questioning and scientific thinking. The people refused to accept blindly the Church and its activities. Further, the evil practices and abuses of the Church were exposed publicly by the Renaissance thinkers through their creations; the best specimen is the work of Erasmus of Rotterdam and his magnum opus, *In Praise of Folly*.

Birth of Reformation

Germany was the home of Reformation and it was Martin Luther who publicly opposed the Roman Catholic Church. But the origins of Reformation can be traced back to 14th century in England. **John Wycliffe**, the Morning Star of English Reformation, strongly criticised the immoral life of the clergy. Following him, John Huss of Bohemia propagated the teachings of Wycliffe and became a staunch opponent of the Church.

Reformation in Germany

It was in Germany that the Protestant Reformation began. There were many factors that favoured Germany to be the home of Reformation. Firstly, it was the moral and economic exploitation of the Church that was responsible for the beginning of Reformation in Germany. The exploitation was too pronounced that the people were fed up with the church. Thus all groups of people, the peasants, the middle class and even the believers were against the Church.



Printing Press in 1440

The invention of the **Printing Press** by **John Gutenberg** also favoured Germany. It led to the printing of pamphlets and printed materials and their distribution among the people, who could clearly understand the deviation of the Church authorities from the original scriptures

The moral decay of the Church found itself in the sale of Indulgences in the 15th and 16th centuries. In 1517, Tetzal, the agent of Pope came to Germany for the sale of Indulgences; this provoked Martin Luther to revolt publicly against the Church.

Martin Luther

He was the professor of theology in the University of Wittenberg in Germany. Being a professor well versed in Christian scriptures, he had disagreement with regard to certain practices and ideology the Church. In 1510, he eye witnessed the moral degradation of the Church and experienced corruption among the clergy, when he visited Rome; he was convinced himself the need for reform. The arrival of **Tetzel** for the sale Indulgences provided the apt opportunity for revolt.



Martin Luther

In October, 1517, Luther, following a University custom, posted Ninety Five Theses or Propositions on the subject of Indulgences on the door of the church at Wittenberg. He also challenged anyone to debate them with him.

He believed that a man could possess a direct relationship with God without the mediation of the Church. He further argued that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does better than who buys Indulgences. He stressed the supreme authority of Bible as the foundation of the Church and Belief. He also stood for the priesthood of all believers. He stated, '**every man is his own priest**', and opposed the system of hierarchy in the Church. Luther also repudiated the supreme authority of the Church over political affairs and openly declared that the Church had no power to indulge in the affairs of the state.

The Pope and the Church authorities were very furious about the ideas and practice of Luther, and ordered him to withdraw the **95 Theses**. Instead of accepting the order, Martin Luther publicly set on fire the order. This works of Luther compelled the Church to outcaste and excommunicate him in 1521. This resulted in a split in the Church, for Luther was aptly supported by rulers of small German principalities, notable among them was the ruler of Saxony. In course of time, Luther brought out the German translation of Bible. Thus the Lutheran Church was born, which led to conflict between the

Lutherans of Northern Germany and the Catholic believers of the Southern parts of Germany. The conflict had finally led to the establishment of an independent Lutheran Protestant Church in 1555.

Reformation in Other Parts of Europe

The success of Lutheranism in Germany prompted many countries of Europe to revolt, which resulted in emergence of protest movements. The Protestant Revolution in Switzerland was led by **Ulrich Zwingli** and **John Calvin**. The former, even more than Luther placed his faith in the authority of Christian Scriptures alone. He denounced the sale of Indulgences, and laid the foundation for the emergence of Zwinglianism. What he had was that he gave an initial impetus to Protestantism in Switzerland.

John Calvin

John Calvin was the most famous 16th century Protestant leader next to Luther. A French man by birth, Calvin studied theology and law at Paris, where he was interested in the teachings of Luther. He deserted Catholicism and his 'conversion' resulted in his escape from France. He fled to Switzerland, where he set up Calvinism, the core of his religious preaching. He spent most of his life at Geneva, where he became the real ruler.

The magnum opus of Calvin, **'The Institutes of the Christian Religion'** was published in 1536. It is unquestionably one of the most important books on systematic theology ever written. He believed in the theory of predestination, rejected the doctrine of Sacraments and aimed at the establishment of a religion with simplicity. Calvinism, in course of time, spread to France, Holland, Germany, Hungary, Poland and England. The French Calvinists were known as Huguenots.



John Calvin

England also had her share in the Protestant Reformation. In England it started not on religious lines, but on personal and political grounds. Unlike

in other parts of Europe, Reformation in England was led by the King himself, **Henry VIII**. The king along with divorcing his wife, wanted to marry Anne Boleyn and the consequent refusal of the Pope to grant divorce resulted in setting up separate church. He also severed all relations with Roman Catholic Church. Being the ruler, by passing the **Act of Supremacy in 1534**, he became the head of the English Church, but retained Catholic doctrine and rituals. The newly constituted church was named as the Anglican Church and the broke away religion as **Anglicanism**.

COUNTER REFORMATION

The realisation that the policy of prosecution and suppression of Protestant revolt would not bring the desired results prompted the Church authorities to think seriously to reform itself which resulted in the Counter Reformation. To put it simply, it was a movement within the Roman Catholic Church to reform and to do away with the so called abuses of the Church. Hence, it can also be called Catholic Reformation, and it began with Paul, who became the Pope in 1534. The Counter Reformation was effected through Three main agencies; **The Council of Trent, the Inquisition and the Society of Jesus**.

The Council of Trent was a conference of the Roman Catholic Church held between 1545 and 1563 at Trent in Northern Italy. In the light of protests from many quarters, the Council discussed, clarified and redefined the doctrines, most of which had been disputed by the Protestants, of Christianity. Primarily, it tried to bring moral reforms within the Church. It also cemented the indispensable authority of the Pope. As already stated, it made drastic reforms in the discipline and administration of the Church; and forbidden evils such as simony and secular pursuits on the part of the clergy. For providing better moral education for the clergy, seminaries were started. Finally, it made a list of books, known as the Index, that contain anti Catholic tempers and ordered Catholics not to read those books. It also redefined heresy.

The Inquisition was a tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church to try the cases of heresy. Its trials were held in secret under great

torture and punishments were so cruel that these included fines, flogging, imprisonment and death by burning. Thus, through ferocious means, it tried to bring glory to the Church.

The Society of Jesus was another agency to bring reforms within the Church. It was founded by **Ignatius of Loyola** (1491-1556), a Spanish soldier in 1534 and it had much to do with the revival of Catholicism in the latter half of the 16th century. The members of the Society were called Jesuits and It was approved by the Pope in 1540 as a monastic order. This Order, the Order of the Jesuits or the Company of Jesus tried to regain the lost glory and power of the Church by starting schools and organising missionary services. It also attempted to bring back Protestants to Catholicism. In addition to the already existing vows of chastity, obedience and poverty with regard to the clergy, a special vow of allegiance to Pope was also made by this Order. But, it suppressed free thinking and strict discipline was severely implemented. It also worked hand in hand with the Inquisition.

Effects of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation

The religious division of Europe into a number of hostile camps was one of the effects of reformation. This resulted in religious conflicts and wars in Europe in the name of religious ideology.

The rise the Protestant ethic and ideology led to entrepreneurship, which naturally resulted in the growth of capitalism.

Reformation had played vital role in the rise of nationalism in Europe. The rise absolute monarchy in Europe had its foundation in the Reformation.

The establishment of schools and seminaries and the spread of education were the lasting impact of Reformation. This stimulated people to re-examine and question age old ideas, beliefs and institutions.

But, like all religions, Reformation made hurdles in the growth of science and art. More than emphasising the spirit of reason and rationality, they still insisted on faith, which became a hurdle to science.