

# The Spread and Impact of the Reformation

## *What were the effects of the Reformation?*

### **Introduction**

In this lesson, you will learn more about the movement called the Reformation and the Protestant churches that emerged in the 1500s. You will also explore the impact of the Reformation on the Catholic Church and on the history of Europe.

As Protestantism spread, it branched out in several directions. By the start of the 1600s, there were already many different Christian churches in Europe.

Each Protestant denomination had its own beliefs and practices. However, all Protestants had much in common, including a shared belief in the authority of the Bible, individual conscience, and the importance of faith. In addition, they were united in their desire to **reform** Christianity.

The growth of Protestantism also helped to encourage a reform movement within the Catholic Church called the Counter-Reformation. As part of this movement, Church leaders worked to correct abuses, clarify and defend Catholic teachings, and condemn what they saw as Protestant **errors**. Additionally, they tried to win back areas of Europe that had been lost to the Catholic Church.

The many divisions among Christians led to a series of wars and persecutions. People suffered because of their beliefs. Catholics fought Protestants, and Protestants fought one another. These struggles involved political, economic, and cultural differences, as well as deep religious beliefs.

The Reformation brought much conflict to Europe, but it also created many new forms of the Christian faith. Three new branches of Christianity that developed early in the period were Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism.

### **1. Lutheranism**

The first major Protestant sect was **Lutheranism**. Lutheranism began in Germany after Martin Luther was excommunicated by the Catholic Church in 1521.

Luther was a Catholic priest and scholar who taught scripture and theology (the study of religion) at the University of Wittenberg. As he studied the Bible, Luther became troubled because he could not find a basis for many Church teachings and practices. He was also upset about corruption in the Church, especially the sale of indulgences.

Luther tried to work out his differences with the Church. However, after his views were condemned, he started the separate movement that became Lutheranism.

**Beliefs About Sin and Salvation:** Luther and his followers disagreed with the Catholic Church about sin and salvation. Catholics believed that people earned salvation by following the teachings and practices of the Church. Taking part in the sacraments was essential. For example, the sacrament of baptism wiped away original sin. In Christian belief, this was the sinful condition passed on to all people by Adam, the first man created by God. Once they were baptized, people needed to pray, take the sacraments, follow rules laid down by the Church, and perform good works.

Lutherans did not believe that people could do anything to earn their salvation, rather it was God's gift, which people received in faith. People would be “justified,” or saved, if they sincerely believed in Jesus Christ, were sorry for their sins, and accepted the words of the Bible as truth. Luther called this “justification by faith.” According to Luther, those who have faith perform good works and avoid sin because God commands them to, not in order to earn salvation.



languages so that people could read it for themselves.

**Ultimate Source of Authority:** Lutherans rejected traditional sources of religious authority, such as Church councils and the pope, and instead believed that the Bible was the only true source of religious guidance. Reading the Bible was the only way to learn how to lead a good life and gain faith in God. Lutherans published the Bible in several

**Rituals and Worship:** Lutheran services combined Catholic practices with new Lutheran ones. Lutherans met in church buildings that had originally been Catholic. Like Catholics, they used an altar, candles, and a crucifix, which represented the crucifixion of Jesus.

Lutheran services resembled the Catholic mass in several ways. The services included Holy Communion, the Christian ritual of sharing bread and wine to commemorate the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples before his death. Lutheran services also included Bible readings and a sermon, in which clergy explained the day's lesson from the Bible. Like Catholics, Lutherans sang hymns. Luther wrote these hymns in German for his followers and often set them to popular tunes so everyone could learn them more easily.

Other parts of Lutheran worship were different from Catholic practice. Prayers were written and spoken in German, not in Latin, so that everyone could participate. Instead of having seven sacraments, Lutherans had just two, baptism and Communion, which Luther believed were the only sacraments clearly named in the Bible.

**Community Life:** Luther gave his followers certain rules for how to live. Over time, he preached less about the Bible and instead started to place greater importance on discipline and strong families. He believed that fathers should teach their children religion by having them pray before meals and before bed. “Unless they [pray],” he said, “they should be given neither food

nor drink.” He also thought that women should get married and give birth to as many children as possible. He felt that these rules would help to strengthen Lutheran communities.

Unlike Catholic priests, Lutheran ministers, or members of the clergy, were allowed to marry. Luther himself married a former nun.

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