

RENEGADE



THE
REFORMATION
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THE REFORMATION

The Roman Catholic Church was a central part of everyday life in medieval Europe. It exercised authority over people's spiritual lives and had real political power.

In October 1517 Martin Luther, a German monk and scholar, began to question publicly many of the teachings and practices of the Church. His actions sparked a revolution that divided Europe and changed the course of history.

Luther's initial attack focussed on the practice of selling indulgences. These were granted by the Pope for the full or partial remission of the sins of souls in purgatory. People buying indulgences thought they were buying a ticket into heaven for themselves or their relatives. On 31 October 1517, Luther nailed his 95 theses against indulgences on the church door at Wittenberg in northern Germany.

News of Luther and his challenge to the Church spread rapidly throughout Europe. The recent invention of the printing press played a central role in the circulation of his radical ideas. These were taken up by a range of different people from English radicals like scholar William Tyndale, to royal rogues like Henry VIII. The reform started by Luther would have profound consequences in England, triggering centuries of religious upheaval, conflict and suppression.



ROYAL ROGUE

HENRY VIII (1491-1547) is most famous for having six wives, whom he married in a desperate attempt to produce male heirs. His father, Henry VII, had seized the English throne from Richard III in 1485, and Henry wanted a son to ensure the Tudor dynasty.

After the Pope refused to allow a divorce from his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, Henry made himself head of the English Church in order to divorce Katherine and marry Anne Boleyn. Between 1529 and 1534, Henry ended Papal influence in England and then destroyed the monasteries, which were an important and wealthy part of the medieval Church. The money and power of the Catholic Church in England now rested in Henry's hands.

Although Henry rejected the power of the Pope, he never supported Luther. His new Church was a strange mixture of Protestant and Catholic beliefs. On a single day in 1540, he executed three Catholics and three Protestants all together, for challenging his unique version of Christianity. After Henry's death, his young son, Edward VI, took the country in a much more radical direction. He died in 1553 and was succeeded by his elder sister Mary who had remained a committed Catholic. She burned nearly 300 Protestants during her five-year reign. Elizabeth I re-established the Church of England which remains an important English institution today.



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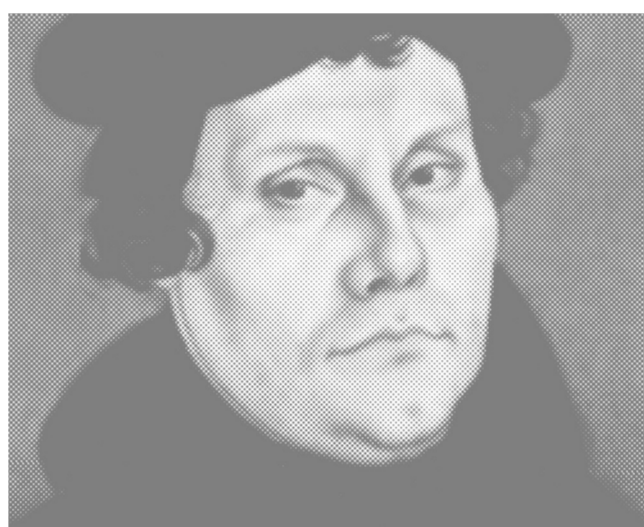
Printed on Offenbach Bible paper. Design, Modern Designers.

RELIGIOUS RENEGADE

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546) was professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg in Saxony, northern Germany. He soon expanded his 1517 attack to include other accepted practices of the Church such as the eucharist, baptism and penance. He argued that the only way to heaven was through faith in God and reading the bible. The Pope declared Luther a heretic, and in 1521 the Holy Roman Emperor outlawed him. He was able to escape arrest and execution with the support and protection of his local ruler, Frederick III, Elector of Saxony.

From his base in Wittenberg, Luther exploited the relatively new technology of printing to promote his message across Germany and Europe. He was able to communicate complex ideas in a way that could be read and understood by many. The years of struggle, against the Catholic Church and amongst his fellow reformers, took their toll and Luther suffered from periods of depression and illness. He died at the age of 62 in Eisleben, Saxony, the city where he was born.

Luther's ideas led to the creation of Protestant Churches throughout Europe, sparking centuries of conflict between Catholic and Protestant states. Modern European identities were fundamentally shaped by the religious changes set in motion by Martin Luther.



RADICAL REFORMER

WILLIAM TYNDALE (c1494-1536) had studied theology and languages, including Greek and Hebrew, at Oxford and Cambridge universities. Inspired by Luther, he abandoned his position as a Catholic priest and became a leading figure in the English reform movement. His most important contribution was the translation of the New Testament into English, but he also wrote several original works that were crucial to spreading Luther's ideas in England.

Tyndale left England when his controversial opinions began to attract the attention of authorities. He remained in exile and on the run for the rest of his life. The English printing industry was centralised in London and very tightly regulated, so most of Tyndale's works were printed on the continent and smuggled into England. He was finally captured and executed at Vilvoorde, near Brussels in 1536.

Although Henry never allowed Tyndale to publish his bible in England his translation was hugely influential in the development of the English language. It was the basis of the English bible authorised by Henry in 1539 and the King James Bible of 1611. Today we still use many of the phrases Tyndale invented including 'fight the good fight' and 'the powers that be'.



THE THREE SOLAS

At the heart of Martin Luther's attack on the Catholic Church, was a very simple and powerful idea: that faith alone leads to salvation. Over the next century, Protestantism splintered into lots of different sects but they all inherited three key religious principles. These were established by the early reformers in opposition to the traditions of the Catholic Church.

SOLA FIDE (BY FAITH ALONE)

This is the idea that faith in God alone leads to salvation and a place in heaven. The ceremonies and rituals of the Catholic Church, good deeds and indulgences could not get you into heaven.

SOLA SCRIPTURA (BY SCRIPTURE ALONE)

Christians believe the bible is the Word of God. Protestants claimed the bible was the supreme source of religious authority, rather than the Pope.

SOLA GRATIA (BY GRACE ALONE)

Luther argued that salvation was the result of divine grace, a gift from God which could not be earned by the Christian believer.



THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

At this time, the sacraments of the medieval Catholic Church were at the heart of everyone's lives, and it was important to perform them in order to get into heaven. Luther argued that only some of these sacraments were actually in the bible, and later most Protestant Churches only had two sacraments: baptism and the eucharist.

BAPTISM

A rite of admission to the Church, usually performed on newborn babies, based on the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan.

CONFIRMATION

This is a further initiation rite, which happens after baptism, generally undertaken when the child is old enough to understand it.

EUCCHARIST

Called the 'Mass' in the Catholic Church, this was a ceremony based on the Last Supper, when bread and wine turned into the body and blood of Jesus, known as 'transubstantiation'.

CONFESSION

The confession of sins, and the ability of a priest to absolve people's sins, was a central feature of the medieval Church. People believed that the forgiveness of sin reduced their time in purgatory - a temporary stop for souls before entrance to heaven.

EXTREME UNCTION

Also known as the Last Rites, the confession of sins on your death bed and the absolution from a priest helped your passage to heaven and reduced the time you spent in purgatory.

ORDINATION

This was the sacrament of creating a priest. In the medieval Church, priests were a channel between God and the faithful.

MATRIMONY

Catholics believed marriage was a sacred rite of the Church. In contrast, many Protestants argued it was just a contract between a man and woman and so divorce was possible. The Church of England maintained a more conservative view, despite the initial approval of Henry's divorce.



Exhibition curator: Julianne Simpson, Rare Books and Maps Manager, The University of Manchester

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Martin Luther, by Lucas Cranach, c1528 courtesy of Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Germany

Henry VIII, anonymous artist, c1520 © National Portrait Gallery, London