

FOUNDED UPON ROCK: PART V  
THE RENAISSANCE AND THE BEGINNING  
OF THE PROTESTANT TRADITIONS

I. The era of the late fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries was a complex and rapidly changing time. During this era Christianity became more divided. But her people also sent missionaries abroad to newly discovered lands. Prosperity, secular advancements, and political centralizations both challenged the Church and allowed rapid development.

A. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, the Renaissance era led to a great increase in learning, education, culture and political centralization. These developments helped the Church promote sacred art, music, learning, architecture and culture in general. But it also led to greater secularization and even borderline paganism

B. Many legitimate calls for reform, combined with greater nationalism and individualism, prepared the way for the Protestant Reformation, which took many different forms even from its earliest days.

C. In response to Protestantism, the Renaissance, and the understandable calls for reform, there was a great internal reformation within the Church, along with the rise of new religious orders and traditions of spirituality.

D. In the wake of the fall of Constantinople, there were two centuries of threats from the Ottoman Empire to invade parts of Europe. The Pope and the Catholic nations of Europe gradually fought back the attacks.

E. The Age of Exploration opened up vast new lands for missionary work, which the Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans took on with great zeal. Issues arose as the interests of colonial lords could conflict with the goals of the missionaries and the balancing of unity and diversity became more of a focus.

II. The Renaissance era was marked by a great increase in learning, artistic expression, technology and building, much of which benefitted the Church. But there was also an increase in worldliness, skepticism, and even decadence.

A. With reference to learning, the Renaissance promoted education for a broader range of the general public, and an emphasis on human expression, the classics and the sciences.

1. This general focus on broader learning actually began with the introduction of Greek philosophy to Europe in the thirteenth century and was championed at universities or that era.

2. But starting in about the mid-fifteenth century, the nobles, merchants and families with financial means generally started having their children educated. The formal education was mostly for sons, but many families of the upper classes would hire tutors for the daughters as well. Thus developed the idea of a “Renaissance man,” i.e., one who had a vast array of talents and learning in many

fields.

3. There was a greater focus on the classics of Greece and Rome, including even pagan literature. Before that era, at least in theory, people would study the pagan classics, such as the writings of Virgil or Ovid, only to learn style, not as good entertainment.

4. There was also a greater research into the original Greek and even Hebrew of the Bible. In addition, the greater literacy meant that more people could read the Bible. The Church never forbade the laity from reading the Bible, nor forbade translations of the Bible. The Church did insist that translations of the Bible, and theological texts generally, receive official Church approval.

B. Due to development of the printing press about 1436, there was a great increase in the availability of books and thus a vast increase in writing, both sacred and secular.

1. The first book off of the printing press that Johannes Gutenberg developed was the Bible.

2. Also, due to the Crusades, the technology of making cheaper paper came to Europe in the thirteenth century. That technology was also essential to the vastly greater availability of books.

3. Italy was the center of printing in Europe; but by 1500, over 400 cities in Europe produced books.

C. Artistically, the Renaissance promoted a much greater emphasis on realism, on the human form, and even on themes from pagan literature.

1. This artistic Renaissance, along with the architectural Renaissance, began in Italy in the fifteenth century, but spread to northern Italy by the early sixteenth century and then to the rest of western Europe.

2. With enriched capacities, such as the ability to produce three-dimensional focuses in painting and greater technology in the production and use of marble, realism became a focus. Artists would portray much more complex images, in painting, tapestry, and sculpture. Figures would be seen more often in motion and with greater expression.

3. The likes of Michalangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino) and Fra Angelico championed Renaissance art in southern Europe. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the likes of Peter Paul Rubens and Rembrandt (Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn) brought such the effects of the Renaissance to the north of Europe.

4. To the Church's advantage, there was a great deal of exquisite art portraying sacred themes. However, there was also a great emphasis on pagan themes in art.

In addition, sometimes even the sacred art would become more the focus than the sacraments and prayer.

D. With reference to architecture, the Gothic style declined and baroque forms became more popular.

1. The term baroque was originally an insult, meaning eccentric, or odd. But it soon became accepted as a positive description.
2. Baroque architecture emphasized proportion and a focus on the realistic human form more. There were more rounded edges and lively decoration.
3. In Rome, the old St. Peter's Basilica had fallen into disrepair. And so, Pope Julius II began a complete reconstruction of the basilica, beginning in 1505. All over Rome and elsewhere in Europe, churches and other buildings were rebuilt in the baroque style. The Barberini family was particularly prominent in the Italian reconstruction.

E. Musically, there was a greater emphasis on lighter motifs and complex styles, such as polyphony and madrigals, which put popular poems to music and emphasized emotions.

1. There was a great flourishing of Mass parts set to music. However, sometimes the complexity became overbearing.
2. Entertainment and education in music became much more easily available.

F. Politically, there was a greater emphasis on centralization and the idea of a professional governmental and political class. Economically, trade led to a vast increase in wealth, and also a greater power in the merchant class.

1. More powerful governments and monarchies developed in the great European kingdoms, such as England, France, Denmark and Sweden and the new kingdom of Spain (uniting the Christian kingdoms of Aragon and Castille.) The city states of northern Italy also increased in power. The power of the Holy Roman Emperor, however, was declining, as the princes of that Empire became more independent.
2. Macchiavelli's 1513 book The Prince would define, even now 500 years later, a more cynical view of government, not as reflecting an eternal order, but rather as a matter of gaining and keeping power.
3. There was also a greater willingness to critique powers in the world. In 1511, Desiderius Erasmus published In Praise of Folly, a satirical attack on many authorities and superstitions of the time. More positively, in 1516 he published The Education of the Christian Prince, which described the monarch as the servant of the people. His good friend Thomas More, who became the Lord Chancellor of England, also was willing to critique both civil and ecclesial authorities.



G. Within the Church, the greater learning and wealth allowed a great increase in building, art, music, and education. But there could also be a certain worldliness that set in.

1. The term Renaissance Popes generally refers to the 10 popes from Nicolas V (1447-55) to Leo X (1513 -1521).
  - On the one hand, they were powerful leaders, defending the authority of the papacy and engaging in much construction.
  - On the other hand, they were often very worldly, and even decadent. Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) in particular attracted much ridicule for his immoral life.
2. Bishops likewise wielded great authority, but could often act more like wealthy nobles than churchmen.

III. In this context of increased learning, centralization of power, and a restive spirit, the Protestant Reformation occurred.

A. There had already been several attempts at rebellion against the Church in the late Middle Ages.

1. Intellectually, William of Ockham (1287-1347), a Franciscan and student from Oxford, promoted nominalism, which denied that there is any such thing as a nature or essence. He said that such categories, which the Church has used to explain such things as the Trinity, the Incarnation, human nature and the sacraments, are artificial constructs. He also argued that the Church should own no property and the monarchs should control the church in their realms. For this teaching, he was excommunicated in 1328, and took refuge with the Holy Roman Emperor Louis IV.
2. John Wycliffe (1330-84), a professor from Oxford, said that the Christian faith is defined by Scripture alone. He also denied such things as the legitimacy of the hierarchy and transubstantiation as not in the Bible; and he advocated state control of the Church. John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, protected him from adverse consequences.
3. Jan Hus (1372-1415), a priest from Prague promoted the ideas of John Wycliffe and denounced (with some justification) immorality and worldliness among the clergy. Although supported by his archbishop, his teachings were denounced by both Pope Gregory XII and the Council of Constance. At the Emperor Sigismund's recommendation, he appeared at the Council of Constance and argued his case. But the Council condemned him as a heretic and burned him at the stake. Soon after his death, he was considered by many to be a martyr; and his followers, the Hussites, continued to defy authorities in Bohemia.
4. In 1491, the Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarolla (1452-1498) was elected prior of the monastery in Florence. For a time, he led a moral revival

there and successfully opposed the Medicis, a dominant Italian family. When Alexander VI was elected Pope, Savonarolla denounced him as immoral, not a real Christian, and therefore, not the legitimate Pope. Alexander VI excommunicated him, and he was tried and executed in Florence. As with John Hus, he was considered to be a martyr by many in Florence.

B. There was also much popular discontent, even amidst the great faith, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

1. Many bishops had several dioceses, and were not resident in any of them. And likewise, many pastors had several parishes, and appointed relatively uneducated curates to staff them. In theory church law forbade holding more than one diocese or parish. But clergy could pay a fee for a dispensation from this requirement.

2. Because many bishops, abbots, abbesses, and other high church officials were in charge of vast resources, noble families often maneuvered to have their candidates, and even members of their families take these offices. The powerful Roman families, such as the Borgias and Medicis, were particularly known for trying to get their candidates elected Pope. Some of these officials, most notoriously Pope Alexander VI, led immoral lives; and others, while avoiding breaking their vows, were very worldly.

3. The education of many of the clergy was minimal, leaving them unable to discuss the increasingly sophisticated issues of the era. On the other hand, within universities, there was a perception that scholarship, particularly in theology and philosophy, was becoming very abstract and inapplicable to regular life.

4. Both in Rome and in dioceses, chancery staffs were increasing rapidly. And to fund them, as well as the massive building projects, church officials were often selling indulgences. The officials doing so sometimes exaggerated the effects of the indulgences and downplayed the need for personal conversion. Johann Tetzel (1465 – 1519), a German Dominican, was particularly known for his aggressive promotion of indulgences, partially to support the building of the new St. Peter's basilica in Rome.

5. Church officials could also be aggressive in collected mandatory tithes and fees for the sacraments.

6. The advances in art and music could create situations where churches and Masses were focused more on music and art than on the sacraments.

7. Government officials also frequently lived very high lives, and taxation was increasing. The increased trade led to many vast fortunes, but also some strife as cities could become places of crime, pollution and vast overcrowding.



C. Martin Luther (1483-1546) launched the first broad based and successful attempt to establish another branch of Christianity in the West.

1. Very religious and deeply concerned with divine judgment from an early age, he was ordained an Augustinian monk and became a professor in Wittenburg, Germany.

2. He was rightfully upset with abuses in the field of indulgences. And so, on October 31, 1517, he posted the 95 Theses as a challenge to a debate. These theses were not a denial of Church doctrine, but rather a vehement denunciation of many of the practices regarding indulgences.

3. When Church authorities did nothing to respond to his concerns, he became more adamant in denouncing practices within the Church, and even began to question Church doctrine on such matters as the sacraments.

4. In 1518, he met with St. Cajetan, the Master General of the Dominican order in 1518; and in 1519, he debated Johannes Eck, a priest and prominent German theologian. Over the course of this time, he developed doctrines contrary to the Catholic faith, including the view that Scripture alone is the basis for doctrine and the belief that there are only two sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, with confession as a renewal of baptism. He outlined his views in three works published in 1520: To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and On the Freedom of a Christian.

5. In 1520, Pope Leo X condemned his teachings and demanded that he recant them. In 1521, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V called a council (called a diet) at Worms in Germany to make an attempt at reconciliation. Martin Luther burned the Pope's order and made his famous "here I stand" speech. The break was then complete.

6. Martin Luther was able to gain much support from the German nobility, especially because he emphasized the importance of national identity and promoted a system in which church revenues would remain in Germany.

7. Luther did want to maintain many elements of the Catholic Church, including a structured liturgy, affirming the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, infant baptism, an ordained clergy (although not Popes and bishops), and a certain veneration for Mary and the saints, although he did not believe that they could intercede for us. His basis for the faith would become summarized in the formula "Solely by Scripture, solely by faith, solely by the grace of God." He thought of himself as reforming the Church, not creating a break in Christendom.

8. Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) wrote a biography of Martin Luther and put his theology into more systematic form. He also tried to reconcile Lutheranism with the humanism that was developing.

9. Soon other denominations formed that were further distant from Catholic thought.

D. Shortly after Luther's break from the Church, there were broad ranging changes that Luther disagreed with.

1. Thomas Munster (1489—1525) began arguing that even the text of Scripture is secondary to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. As Joachim of Fiore had done over 300 years earlier, he preached that a new age of the Spirit had begun and a formal hierarchy and Church authority was now unnecessary.

2. In Germany, the Peasants' Revolt broke out in 1524, based in large part upon the willingness to take on authorities. It was supported, not only by peasants, but by many prosperous farmers and city dwellers. They looked to Martin Luther for support, for they saw his rebellion against Rome as a model for their own cause. However, although he was sympathetic to some of the calls for reigning in arbitrary power, Luther did not want a political revolution that upset the social structure, instead preferring gradual reform. And soon the princes of Germany harshly put down the rebellion and executed its leaders including Thomas Munster.

E. Soon, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and John Calvin (1509-64) led the development of a theology that would come to be known as Reformed Protestantism.

1. Ulrich Zwingli, a Swiss priest, became the pastor of the cathedral in Zurich in 1521. In 1522, he resigned his priestly office and, with 10 other priests, called for the abolition of the vow of celibacy. Soon he taught, with Luther, that Scripture alone is the rule of faith; but he went further than Luther. Thus, he also held that such teachings as the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and such practices as having church calendars, altars, church music and monasteries and convents were unjustified.

2. The Zurich City Council took up his ideas and exerted control over the church in that city, taking over church property and destroying the decorations and altars of the churches.

3. Zwingli promoted a very simplified church and liturgy. The doctrinal differences, especially over the Eucharist, led to a strong division with Martin Luther.

4. John Calvin, another Swiss theologian, took up Zwingli's theology and developed the Reformed theology for the future. He strongly emphasized the absolute sovereignty of God, teaching that God's predestines all events and all human responses. The idea, which would come to be known as "double predestination," teaches that God predestines some to salvation and some to condemnation, and that there is nothing anyone can do to stop this decree. Like

Martin Luther, he maintained that human nature is so corrupt that good works do not contribute to our salvation, but are signs that we are already saved. Unlike Martin Luther, he did maintain that a person could be certain, not only that he is currently in the grace of God, but that he is one of the elect, who will persevere to the end.

5. There was also an emphasis on strict morality, not as a means of salvation (that was thought to be by grace alone), but rather to bring about more of the kingdom of God on earth. And so, starting with Geneva, Calvin and his followers, persuaded many civil authorities to enforce public morality, often with harsh means. This moral reform was both attractive to many people, who desired more order, but also led to backlashes.

6. Later, a theologian names Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) accepted the Calvinist teachings on the depravity of human nature and the simplicity of worship, but also maintained that all people are elected by God for salvation, but have the free will to accept or reject this election. In addition, he had a more optimistic view regarding the holiness attainable even in this life. But, in the Synod of Dort (1618-19), the Calvinist rejected this idea, maintaining double predestination as doctrine. Despite this rejection, Arminian theology continued to be influential and would be a substantial force behind the founding of the Methodist church in the eighteenth century and later evangelical movements of the twentieth century.

F. Soon the Anabaptist tradition arose, a tradition that emphasized an even simpler church that the Calvinists proposed and insisted that baptism could only be conferred on one who can know what it is and choose it.

1. The Anabaptist tradition arose in Zurich and argued that there should be no overall church authority at all; rather, every parish should run itself. However, the community as a whole could interpret Scripture and could excommunicate (shun) anyone who misbehaves in a scandalous fashion. They tended to look down on civil government as a necessary evil. There was also some who approved of polygamy.

2. The Anabaptists took over the governance of the German city of Munster in 1534 and expelled other religions. However, the Catholic bishop of Munster raised an army, which was composed largely of Lutherans, to regain control. And in June of 1535, they took back the city by force, putting to death the leaders of the Anabaptist.

3. After that time, Anabaptists became more pacifist in their leanings, and in fact often forbade taking civil offices.

4. The Mennonites and the Amish are heirs to this tradition.

H. In England, Henry VIII broke from the Pope, and the Church of England gradually

became completely separate, although it retained Catholic elements.

1. When Martin Luther first broke from the Church, King Henry VIII, with the assistance of St. Thomas More, wrote Defense of the Seven Sacraments, which was also a broad refutation of Lutheranism.

2. However, Henry VIII soon wanted an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, the sister of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, for she had not given him a male child. When Pope Clement VII would not grant the annulment, or make any other arrangement, Henry VIII had Parliament conduct a trial, which held in his favor. The next year, in 1530, Parliament declared the Church in England was independent from the Pope, and that the king was its head. Henry appointed Thomas Cramner as Archbishop of Canterbury, and Archbishop Cramner approved of the annulment, allowing Henry to marry Ann Boleyn.

- Almost all of the English bishops sided with Henry VIII. But St. John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester opposed him. And the former Chancellor St. Thomas More would not take Henry's side on this point, although he did not actively oppose him either. As a result, Henry VIII had both of them beheaded.

3. Between 1535 and 1540 Henry VIII dissolved all of the 825 religious houses in England, and seized their wealth, using it largely to reward his allies. The move was not as unpopular as might be thought, for the great wealth of the monasteries created a great deal of resentment.

4. Despite the moves against the Church, Henry VIII in most other ways preserved the theology and practices of the Catholic Church, calling himself the head of the Catholic Church in England. Henry VIII also established English domination over the whole of Ireland, completing a project English kings had been working on for three centuries.

5. However, his son Edward VI became king in 1547 and took England into a much more Calvinist direction. With the support of Archbishop Cramner and an obedient Parliament, he radically simplified the liturgy and eliminated such things as priestly celibacy and a belief in the Eucharist as having the presence of Jesus Christ.

6. However, when Edward VI died in 1553, his older half-sister Mary became queen. A devout Catholic, Mary tried to bring England back to the Catholic Church. She married Philip II, the king of Spain, restored many monasteries and brought the reform minded Cardinal Reginald Pole, who had opposed Henry VIII, to become the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Unfortunately, she tried to use force to compel adherence to the Catholic faith, and executed 200 people for heresy. This use of force and her marriage to Philip II made her more unpopular; and so the Catholic faith did not sink in. She did not have any children, and so her royal efforts to promote Catholicism died with her.

7. When Queen Mary died in 1558, on the same day as Cardinal Pole, her half-sister Elizabeth became queen. She promoted the Anglican Settlement, according to which the details of the Church of England doctrine (such as a belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the value of prayers for the dead) was left ambiguous. The overall structure of the Anglican Church thus came into place.

8. Adherence to the monarch as the leader of the Church of England, and thus the willingness to be independent of the Pope, was mandatory. Those who refused at least the external practice of the Anglican faith were under severe disabilities, and priests were forbidden to be in England at all. Defiance was often considered treason, punishable by tortuous death. Queen Elizabeth persecuted not only Catholics, but also Protestants other than Anglicans as well.

9. Elizabeth was very good at public relations, employing poets, musicians and artists well. The failed invasion of England by the Spanish Armada in 1588 also made her more popular. Her popularity and power made the Anglican Church become dominant in England, although there was still a small minority of Catholics in England; and a large majority of Irish remained Catholic.

10. When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, the Stuart family, who also ruled in Scotland, took over. The first Stuart king was James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England as well. He was a scholar and a devout Anglican; and his greatest project was sponsoring the King James translation of the Bible. The next Stuart King Charles I was married to a Catholic Maria Henrietta, and he was more sympathetic to the Catholic Church. However, an army of Parliament overthrew him in 1642. This overthrow then paved the way for the Puritan Oliver Cromwell to take control of England.

11. Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans in turn became unpopular; and so when he died in 1660, the Stuarts returned under Kings Charles II and then James II, the latter of whom was Catholic. However, King James II proved to be politically inept and was overthrown in the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688, which placed William of Orange and his wife Mary on the throne. That revolution confirmed the dominance of the Anglican Church in England and most of her western colonies. It also established the power of Parliament over the monarch.

12. Anglicanism was established in many ways on a “big tent” approach that left enough ambiguities to be interpreted differently by people with a more Catholic leaning and people with varying degrees of Protestant leanings. Those who were closer to the Catholic Church were often called “high church” and those with more Calvinist leanings were often called “low church.” The Anglican Church was also, from the beginning an established state church.

I. In England and Scotland, the Puritan and Presbyterian traditions arose in response to what was perceived as laxity and an excessive worldliness in the Anglican Church.

1. The Presbyterian tradition was founded by John Knox (1513-72). He became a Protestant minister about 1544, and Edward VI selected him as his chaplain in 1551. In that capacity, he shared Edward VI's Calvinist learnings. When Queen Mary took over, he fled to the Continent, where he developed a form of Calvinism that would also include a certain notion of national identity in the Church. He drafted the Scottish Confession in 1560, and brought it back with him to Scotland. In that land, the Presbyterian faith took hold. It was so named because each individual church was to have a presbyter (elder) as minister; and the national church would be ruled by a council of such presbyters.

2. In reaction to the high church practices of much of the established Church of England, the Puritans gradually formed the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. They advocated a "purification" of the Church from all the things they considered excessive, including highly developed liturgies, expensive decorations, sacramental theologies, the formal hierarchy, and consecrated religious life. They wanted to emphasize a moral rigor and simple community life.

a. Because the high church side of Anglicanism was dominant under the Stuarts, many of the Puritans fled to the Netherlands, which was both Protestant and religiously tolerant in the early seventeenth century. Some of that group then came to Massachusetts in 1620.

b. The Puritans enjoyed a brief time of governmental favor under Oliver Cromwell, but upon his death, they were looked down upon again.

3. Other groups, such as the Baptists and Quakers later arose from the Presbyterian and Puritan traditions.

J. In the early 1600s, western Europe was divided along religious lines.

1. Italy, Spain, and Portugal remained strongly Catholic. After some struggles, Poland in eastern Europe also remained firmly Catholic, with a large Jewish population.

2. France ended up being mostly Catholic after a great deal of infighting.

a. A bastion of Protestantism arose in eastern France; and its adherents became known as the Huguenots.

b. For a time, it seemed like there would be a Protestant king of France as the Calvinist Henry IV of Navarre seemed to be next in line. However, in order to make his ascendancy to the throne more palatable to most of the French, as well as to the papacy and Spain, Henry agreed to be Catholic.

c. In 1598, Henry IV issued the decree of Nantes, which established religious toleration in France. But the government still supported (and

often tried to control) the Catholic Church.

3. The Holy Roman Empire was divided along religious lines.
  - a. In that empire, the princes of the different regions exercised a great deal of control. The Emperor was not as powerful a figure as in other places. The princes were related from ancestors long past, but they were not direct relatives of the Emperor. When an Emperor died or resigned, the princes would select from his close relatives who would be the next Emperor.
  - b. The Diet of Augsburg in 1548 established the principles that the religion of the prince of a region would be the official religion of that region. For a time, a certain peace prevailed. But in the early seventeenth century, feuds between the regions and outside interference led to the very bitter and destructive Thirty Years War from 1618 to 1648. It ended with the Treaty of Westphalia, which diminished the Holy Roman Empire, established many new nations, and set forth clearer demarcations between their lands.
  - c. Overall, the southern German nations tended toward Catholicism and the northern German nations toward Lutheranism
4. With the support of the government, the Anglican Church dominated in England, with small minorities of Catholics and Protestants who were often called nonconformists. Presbyterianism dominated in Scotland. Most of the Irish remained Catholic, and in fact considered Catholicism to be central to their national identity and desire to be independent.
5. The Netherlands gained independence from Spain, and Calvinism took hold over most of the country, under Prince Maurice in the 1580s. However, the country allowed religious variety, and Catholicism still had a strong hold in the south.
6. The Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway and Denmark tended toward various forms of Protestantism, but Lutheranism was the most common faith.
7. The Orthodox countries of eastern Europe were not affected much by Protestantism. The threat from the Ottoman Empire was the main issue.