

CHAPTER 12

The Modern Age in Europe (B) Reformation



SYLLABUS

The Modern Age in Europe

(b) Reformation — causes (dissatisfaction with the practices of the Catholic Church and new learning); Martin Luther's contribution, Counter Reformation.

The Reformation is the name given to a group of religious movements of the sixteenth century launched by the Christians against the various drawbacks of the Church and the objectionable practices of the clergymen. The main target of these movements was the Pope, the highest authority in the Church hierarchy. These movements created a split in the Christian Church between those who continued to remain loyal to the Pope at Rome and those who broke away from the Church at Rome. The former were known as *Roman Catholics* and the latter as *Protestants*.

The Reformation broke out in a number of countries like England, France, Germany, erstwhile Czechoslovakia, Switzerland and Scotland. However, all Protestants did not share the same religious beliefs and rituals. The Protestants of one country and those of another differed from each other in many ways. An extreme form of Protestantism was *Calvinism*. *Presbyterianism* of Scotland and *Puritanism* of England were similar to Calvinism in simplicity, strictness and austerity. Although these movements were organised by different people under different names, they are collectively termed as *Reformation* because they were aimed at reforming the then existing Church.

CAUSES OF THE REFORMATION

The following causes were responsible for the Reformation:

1. DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PRACTICES OF CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catholic Church, during the early medieval period, had become a vast hierarchical organisation headed by the Pope in Rome. The Pope was the supreme authority over the entire hierarchy and he exercised this authority directly. Systematic efforts were made to extend the authority of the Church over everyone, high or low. But during the 14th century, people became dissatisfied with some of the Church practices and this dissatisfaction paved the way for Reformation. These Church practices were the following:

(i) **Economic Factors:** In the middle ages, the Church had vast properties, which gave ample income to the Church. Besides, one-tenth of the income of a person was given to the Church. This was called the *tithe*. In addition to this, the clergy collected another sum called the '*Peter's Pence*' from the people. Pope Leo X wanted to build St. Peter's Church. So he issued *pardon certificates* called '*Indulgences*' to those who gave money to build the Church. Indulgences were letters which remitted punishments of the sinners who bought them, both in this life and after their death. Normally, the priests imposed a *penance* or punishment on a person who had sinned and he was required to perform a special service or make a pilgrimage to a holy place. But now they could be freed from doing penance for their sins by buying a *Letter of Indulgence*.

Finally, the Church offices were given to the highest bidder. This practice came to be known



Erasmus

as simony. All these practices annoyed the rulers as well as the common people.

(ii) **Corruption in the Church:** In the beginning, the clergy led an exemplary life and commanded great respect in the society. But with the passage of time, moral decay crept into some areas in the functioning of the Church. Some of the clergymen lacked proper education and some lived in luxury and neglected their religious duties. The priests promised salvation in exchange for fees. They could pronounce a marriage lawful or unlawful. In fact, there were fees for every transaction in life, from birth to death, fees for the peace of the soul and fees for the souls of the people dead long ago. These practices were severely criticised and opposed by the people. Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch philosopher and humanist exposed them in his book named '*In Praise of Folly*' and prepared the ground for the Reformation.

(iii) **Rulers' Resentment:** Pope's interference in the political affairs was naturally opposed by the kings. They strongly supported the Reformation Movement in order to weaken the Church. As early as the 13th century, the rulers of Europe had quarrelled with the Popes over the royal right to tax the Church property. The rivalry ended in the defeat of the Papacy.

The French King, Philip IV had forced Pope Clement V to leave his headquarters at Rome and stay in Avignon in France, when the latter interfered in the former's political affairs.

King Henry VIII of England hardly cared for the Pope. He got the Church lands and in 1536 passed an Act for the dissolution of monasteries, whereby small monasteries with an income of less than £200 a year were closed and their buildings, land and money taken by the Crown. By another Act of 1539, larger monasteries were closed. The monasteries were a reminder of the power of the Catholic Church. Besides, the monasteries were the wealthiest institutions in the country. King Henry's lavish lifestyle, along with his wars, had led to a lack of money. By destroying the monastic system, Henry could acquire all its wealth and property, while at the same time removing the influence of the Pope.

(iv) **Movements against the Church:**

Anti-Church movements began in Europe in the middle ages. These movements directed their attacks on the wrong doings of the Church. John Wycliffe, an English priest and Oxford professor, criticised the worldliness of the Church and some of its practices. He laid emphasis on the Bible as the sole guide for salvation. The Church ordered his expulsion from the Oxford University where he was teaching. This created dissatisfaction among the scholars.

(v) **Immediate Cause:** Long before the open breach with Rome, there had been some cases of protest against the power of the Pope. These minor revolts were crushed with a heavy hand. So the early reformers met with failure. The challenge was accepted by a German priest, Martin Luther. He raised a strong voice and launched a movement against the abuses in the Church and the authority of the Pope. This proved to be the immediate cause of the Reformation.

2. NEW LEARNING

The spread of new learning and spirit of enquiry was developed by Renaissance scholars. The invention of printing press and the printing of the Bible in vernacular languages brought a new outlook among laymen.

The Renaissance encouraged spirit of enquiry, developed critical attitude and broadened the mental outlook of man. People then began to question everything including the authority of the Pope. They criticised the Church practices, rituals and the lifestyles of some of the clergymen. New learning led to a secular outlook among people.

Nobles and merchants were jealous of the wealth of the Church. The common man in Europe looked upon the Church taxes with contempt. The changing attitude of people towards the Church led to the growth of secular ideas.

MARTIN LUTHER'S CONTRIBUTION

In the 16th century, Martin Luther, a German clergyman and professor of Theology at the University of Wittenburg, openly criticised papacy. He accused the Church for the sale of indulgences. In 1517, Luther wrote Ninety-five theses or statements dealing with the difference between the beliefs and practices of the Church and nailed them on the church door at Wittenburg. Earlier in 1512, he undertook a pilgrimage to Rome and found that some of the clergymen were living a luxurious life. This made him a strong opponent of the Church.

The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, upon request by the Pope, asked Luther to defend his case before a Grand Diet held at Worms known as the Diet of Worms consisting of Council of Princes and high dignitaries in 1521. The Diet ordered that Luther's writings be burnt and Luther be outlawed. But Luther had the support of German rulers; and so no harm was done to him.

This movement soon came to be described as the German Protestant Movement. Luther devoted his time translating the Bible into German and set up an independent church. Luther travelled extensively to different parts of Europe, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The Protestant Movement found wide acceptance.

Lutheranism was recognised as a legal form of Christianity by a treaty known as 'The Peace



Martin Luther

of Augsburg' in 1555, nine years after the death of Luther. This treaty was signed between the Schmalkaldic League (formed by Luther and some German Princes) and the Roman Catholic Church after a long civil war. In Germany, the Southern states continued to remain loyal to the Catholic Church whereas the Northern states accepted Lutheranism.

COUNTER REFORMATION

The Reformation Movement was against the Roman Catholic Church and brought about the birth of the Protestant Church. In order to restore the credibility of the Catholic Church, a large number of dedicated Christians including some Popes introduced certain reforms within the Church. This movement is known as the Counter Reformation. A Church Council was convened at Trent in northern Italy in 1545 by Pope Paul III.

The Council of Trent (1545–1563): The Council made a number of changes in the Catholic Church. It expanded its doctrines in the light of the changed attitudes of the times. It condemned leading an irresponsible religious life by the clergy. Books, which were considered to have had ideas against the Catholic teaching, were banned. The Pope was regarded as the head of the Catholic Church and the final interpreter of the Christian doctrine. The Council of Trent was responsible for establishing centres known as seminaries to educate and train priests. It forbade the Church to charge fees for conducting religious services, and advocated the use of the local language for preaching in the Church.

Society of Jesus: As a result of the Counter Reformation, different religious orders were founded. One of them was the Society of Jesus founded by Ignatius Loyola, a Spanish noble. He studied theology in Sorbonne University. He founded a religious Order by the name of the Society of Jesus with the permission of the Pope. It speedily gained recognition and was successful in winning back more adherents in Europe, India, China, Africa and the Americas.

Saint Francis Xavier: St. Francis Xavier was a follower of Ignatius Loyola. He travelled to China and Japan for the propagation of Christianity. He came to India and worked till his death. His mortal remains are found at the Church of Bom Jesus in old Goa. The selfless and dedicated service rendered by the Jesuits helped in restoring the credibility of the Roman Catholic Church.

EXERCISES

I. Multiple-Choice Questions

A. Choose the correct answers to the questions from the given options.

1. Who exposed the practices of the Church through 'In Praise of Folly'?
(a) Desiderius Erasmus (b) Hugo Grotius
(c) Jacob Moleschott (d) Bernarld Mandeville
2. Which French King, forced Pope Clement V to stay in France?
(a) Philip I (b) Philip II (c) Philip IV (d) Philip III
3. Name the German clergyman and professor of Theology at the University of Wittenburg, who openly criticised papacy.
(a) Martin Thomas (b) Martin Luther
(c) Desiderius Erasmus (d) Philip II
4. Which King of England got the Church lands and in 1536 passed an Act for the dissolution of monasteries?
(a) Henry VII (b) Philip IV (c) Henry VIII (d) Philip VII
5. What is simony?
(a) Practice of joining priesthood.
(b) Practice of church offices given to the highest bidder.
(c) Practice of penance on behalf of a sinner.
(d) None of the above.
6. Who was responsible for establishing seminaries to educate and train priests.
(a) Council of Chalcedon (b) Council of Trent
(c) Council of Nicala (d) Council of Ephesus
7. Who found the Society of Jesus?
(a) Ignatius Loyola (b) Ignatius Gloriana
(c) Philippe de Bourbon (d) Felipe V

B. Read the two statements given below and select the option that shows the correct relationship between (A) and (B).

1. (A) Those who broke away from the Church at Rome were called the Protestants.
(B) The Protestants of one country were different from those of another country in many ways.
(a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)
(c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.
2. (A) In the middle ages the Church had vast properties, which gave ample income to the Church.
(B) The clergy collected 'Peter's Pence' from the people to build St. Peter's Church as well as 'Indulgences' and 'Simony' to get more money.
(a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)
(c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.
3. (A) Lutheranism was recognised as a legal form of Christianity by 'The Peace of Augsburg' in 1555.
(B) The Northern States remained loyal to the Catholic Church and the Southern States accepted Lutheranism.

- (a) (B) contradicts (A)
 (c) (A) is true but (B) is false
 (b) (B) is the reason for (A)
 (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.
4. (A) The Counter Reformation Movement was started to restore the credibility of the Catholic Church.
 (B) By the Council of Trent, the Church was forbidden to charge fees for conducting religious services
 (a) (B) contradicts (A)
 (c) (A) is true but (B) is false
 (b) (A) is the reason for (B)
 (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.

II. Short Answer Questions

1. What is known as the Reformation?
2. What was known as a Letter of Indulgence?
3. What is known as the Protestant Movement?
4. Why did kings support the Reformation Movement?
5. Who was Erasmus? Name the book he wrote.
6. What role did Henry VIII play in curbing the power of the Pope?
7. What was the Counter Reformation?
8. What was the role of the Council of Trent in Counter Reformation?

III. Structured Questions

1. With reference to the Reformation, answer the following:
 - (a) Mention any three Church practices that caused dissatisfaction among the people.
 - (b) How did New Learning become a factor that led to the Reformation?
 - (c) Who were the Protestants? By what other names was Protestantism known?
2. Study the picture given below and answer the following questions.
 - (a) Identify the person in the picture. How did he challenge the church?
 - (b) What is known as the *Diet of Worms*? Who supported him when he was outlawed?
 - (c) State the contribution of this person in reforming the church in Europe.



IV. Thinking Skills

1. Imagine you are Martin Luther, draft a speech that you would give to defend yourself at the Diet of Worms.
2. The period when religious reformers challenged some of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church across Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries, was marked by the rise of Bhakti and Sufi movements in India. Compare and contrast the religious reform movements in India and Europe.

