

**A note prepared by Nivedita Das for the benefit of the IInd Year
students of Sivanath Sastri College**

IInd Year -CC 6

Reformation (A Synopsis)

The typical question asked in the Examinations is “What do you understand by the term Reformation”.

The term Reformation refers to the historic politico-religious process by which the Churches of Northern European countries (such as Germany, England and the Scandinavian countries) broke away from the financial, administrative, theological controls of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy. The political leadership of these countries such as the Tudor Monarch King Henry VIII, and German Princes such as Philip of Hesse and others rebelled against the Roman Catholic Church when they found that their grievances could not be settled after repeated attempts at conciliation. Thus in many textbooks it is referred to as the break with Rome or the ‘Schism’. Protests were made by

- (a) Refusing to pay the “Annates” the yearly tax that was sent to the Papacy,
- (b) By demanding greater financial control over the money that was collected by the Churches which lay within their kingdoms.
- (c) Greater administrative control over the appointment of bishops and the Upper Clergy who controlled large parts of arable land and people within their kingdoms.
- (d) Demanding that Papal personal laws concerning individuals such as marriage, inheritance etc should be discarded and the King should be the final arbitrator in such matters. After all a man cannot have two masters.

It must be remembered that the Roman Catholic Church at the time maintained that any injury or rebelling or the refusal to obey any Papal Bull was rebellion against God himself. Therefore it was important for the protestors (hence the name Protestant) to ‘prove’ that God and his Mercy and Righteousness was on **their** side. Their complains were justified on the grounds

- (a) The Church officials –the bishops in particular were corrupt and led immoral lives. Nepotism and Simony became the focus of public debates.
- (b) It was argued that a Pope was never appointed from North European countries such as Germany and England

- (c) The clerics that were sent to Germany and England were substandard which resulted in poor quality of education in these countries.

It is to be remembered that education was the sole control of the Church. Education became a bone of contention because over the centuries English and German bishops were not appointed as Popes because they were not considered to be scholarly enough when compared to Spanish or French Popes. It was thus necessary to write an alternate reading of the Bible.

It is with this aim that scholars such as Martin Luther, Calvin began to be patronized by political powers and in turn the writings of these scholars were accepted by influential members of society. Scholars have been writing about Church corruptions, alternate readings of the Bible ever since the 14th century but these never became popular. It is to be remembered that the 'common man' was not so much involved in this politico-religious upheaval nor was his sentiment taken seriously. Countries became 'Protestant' if the political authority was Protestant So a Henry VIII could make England Protestant. It would affect the history of England and lead to the beheading of Mary Queen of Scots and the Armada.

Marxist scholars turn their attention on the failure of the Anabaptists to carry out their "no tax campaigns" to highlight the fact that the Reformation was indeed a movement led by the Princes and supported by the influential sections of society such wealthy merchants and sections of the landowning aristocracy who were integrated to international markets. Scholars have highlighted the dichotomy of Lutheran teachings which justified the suspension of the Annates to the Papacy but violently put down the "no tax campaigns" of the Anabaptists.

The Peace of Westphalia marks the birth of Modern Europe in many ways. The Roman Catholic Church realized that it could not ever bring back England, Germany and other Protestant countries under its control. Calvinism, Lutheranism were seen merely as "Dissenters" rather than as heretics who were to be punished by Death. It was also marks the birth of the modern concept of 'minority rights' in European political thoughts.

To the modern day historian the Reformation continues to be of interest because it demonstrates how the rise of conflicting economic interests (trade wars over wool and capture of the markets) when coupled with the already prevalent differences in language, cultural and social differences led to the discarding of the concept of Christendom where religion alone was purportedly the glue that kept Europe together. In other words the English wool trader did not feel any bonding with his Spanish or French counterparts when competing for markets globally-such as in the newly found American colonies. It marked the separation of Religion and politics in the history of Europe.