

European Exploration and the Age of Discovery

On November 16, 1532, two worlds came face to face in the highlands of Peru. On one side was a small band of Spanish soldiers, representing the most powerful kingdom in Europe. On the other was the massive Incan army, representing the greatest empire of the Americas. Although vastly outnumbered, the Spanish used superior weapons and the element of surprise to inflict a deadly blow on the Incans. They were able to capture the Incan emperor and conquer his empire. They went on to build their own empire stretching across the Americas east to west from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

A century before, these events would have been impossible for people of the time to imagine. In 1400, the people of Europe and the Americas knew nothing about each other's lands. Much of the world was disconnected. Even large parts of Asia and Africa were shrouded in mystery for those not living there.

Over the next few centuries, however, many of the geographic and cultural barriers that divided the world came down. Europeans, in particular, traveled the globe, making discoveries and conquering new lands. They created networks of trade and cultural exchange that began to bring the world together. It was the first global age.

The conquest of the Americas triggered an era of global encounters, bringing the disconnected regions of the world together. Although Europe emerged as the major political and economic force, this new power worked in connection with other emerging states such as India, China, and Persia (what is now Iran). The peoples and cultures from these lands, along with those of Africa and the Americas, all helped to shape the new global world.

The Spanish conquest of the Americas was one of the most dramatic events in history. It was also part of a larger pattern of globalization that began in the 15th century and continues to this day. Globalization is the linking of the world's regions, peoples, and economies in a larger global system.

Between 1400 and 1800, increased global interaction brought many changes to the world. In many ways, this period set the stage for the modern era. Several key developments took place at this time:

1. The world's regions became more connected. The movement of people, goods, and ideas increased.
2. The world's population nearly tripled, from around 375 million in 1400 to 950 million in 1800.
3. New technologies—including innovations in navigation, printing, and weaponry—revolutionized travel, communication, and warfare.
4. States (countries) took on increased political and military power. New empires formed around the world.
5. New ideas and scientific knowledge influenced society and culture.

Networks of trade and cultural exchange expanded greatly during this era. Such networks were not new, of course. Ancient trade routes had long linked Asia, Africa, and Europe, allowing for the exchange of goods and ideas. Similar networks existed in the Pacific islands and the Americas. But these networks of exchange became truly global during this period.

The most obvious example of this change was the new contact between the “Old World” of Africa, Europe, and Asia, and the “New World” of the Americas. This contact had major consequences for the world as a whole. At the same time, connections also grew among the continents of the Old World. By the late 1700s, Australia and the Pacific islands were becoming part of this expanding global network.

Many underlying factors helped produce the first global age. The most direct cause was increased sea travel and exploration. Beginning in the late 1400s, European countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean launched sea expeditions and explored the world.

The European explorers of this era were not the first people to travel great distances by ship. The Vikings had crossed the North Atlantic centuries before, traveling as far as Newfoundland. Arab, Indian, and Chinese sailors regularly traveled the seas between Asia and Africa. In the early 1400s, for example, the Chinese admiral Zheng He led a series of great voyages from China to India and East Africa. These expeditions, sponsored by the Ming dynasty, were much larger than later European voyages. The greatest Ming expedition consisted of more than 60 ships and up to 40,000 men. China, however, did not take advantage of these voyages to extend its power or conquer new territory. European states, on the other hand, developed sea travel and used it to serve their economic and political goals. They built large empires and grew rich and powerful in the process.

European states had various reasons to promote sea travel. The first motive was to increase trade. During the Crusades, Europeans had developed a taste for spices and other luxury goods from Asia. Muslim traders carried these goods to the eastern Mediterranean, where they sold them to Venetian merchants who then brought them to Europe. These goods were expensive, however, since the various middlemen involved all made a profit. In addition, the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453 put the trade routes at risk. European countries wanted to establish direct sea routes to Asia so they could reduce costs and gain better access to Asian goods.

A second motive for sea travel was to increase political and military power. Increased trade and commerce would help European states accumulate wealth and pay for larger, more powerful armies. This, in turn, would give them an edge over their European rivals. Exploration also offered these states the chance to form overseas empires, thus adding to their wealth and power.

A third reason for sea travel had to do with ideas. European rulers, supported by the Catholic Church, wanted to spread their religious beliefs and win converts to Christianity. Some Europeans also wanted to learn more about the world. The ideals of the Renaissance, the artistic and cultural flowering of the time, helped inspire this thirst for knowledge.

Another factor that encouraged sea travel was the development of seafaring skills and technologies. Europeans built ships to navigate the open seas. They made use of the magnetic compass, an invention made independently by Europeans and Chinese, and the astrolabe, an ancient Greek tool that allowed sailors to measure latitude. Europeans also advanced the art and science of cartography, or mapmaking.

Portugal, a small nation with a long seafaring tradition, pioneered many of these innovations. The Portuguese developed a light, seaworthy ship called the caravel. This ship was nimble enough to slip into small bays but sturdy enough to travel long distances and carry heavy cannons. Portuguese sailors combined Arab knowledge of math and astronomy with their own practical experience of the sea. With the support of the Portuguese monarchy, they set off on voyages of discovery.

The aim of the Portuguese was to find a sea route to Asia by sailing south and east, around Africa. In 1488, a Portuguese ship rounded the tip of Africa. Ten years later, an expedition under Vasco Da Gama reached India. By 1510, the Portuguese had begun to establish forts and trading posts around the Indian Ocean. From there they moved on to the fabled Spice Islands of the East Indies. They established a base at Malacca, in present-day Malaysia, and another at Macao, in southern China. By 1520, they were the masters of the southern seas.

Meanwhile, Spain was launching its own voyages of exploration. Instead of heading east, however, the Spanish sailed west in the belief that Asia lay just across the Atlantic. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas, claiming these lands for the Spanish crown. He thought he had reached the Indies, but later voyages proved him wrong. In 1519, another Spanish expedition, led by Ferdinand Magellan, set out to reach Asia by sailing around South America. Magellan crossed the Pacific, but was killed in the Philippines. One of his ships made it back to Spain, however, after a three-year journey. It was the first voyage to circle the globe.

Other European countries also sent expeditions across the Atlantic. The Portuguese arrived in Brazil in 1500 and later established a colony. The English, French, and Dutch came to North America and the Caribbean and formed colonies of their own. European states had extended their reach across the Atlantic and connected the Americas to the rest of the world.

Later, in the 1700s, the British sent expeditions into the Pacific Ocean. Captain James Cook explored and mapped Australia, New Zealand, and a number of Pacific islands, including Hawaii. He also landed on the west coast of North America. Cook's voyages helped bring the Pacific region into the new global system.

The impact of the age of exploration was profound. As a result of these discoveries, people began to have a better understanding of world geography. In the Middle Ages, Europeans had thought of Jerusalem as the center of the world, with Africa, Asia, and Europe spread around it. By the 1600s, they had a more accurate view of the world.

The world was also more connected. It was no longer clearly divided into separate worlds: European, Mediterranean, Indian, or Chinese. During this era, economic activity increased as expanded global networks opened up new channels of trade and commerce. The world trading system nearly doubled in size during this period, moving a greater volume and variety of goods than ever before. It was the beginning of a global economy.

Trade was not the only type of exchange that expanded. The movement of people, ideas, and technologies also increased dramatically. So did the transfer of plants, animals, and diseases, which had a major impact on the environment. One of the great tragedies of this era was the death of millions of Native Americans from Old World diseases. Similarly tragic was the enslavement and forced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas. At the same time, increased contact among different racial and ethnic groups had important, long-term effects on societies and cultures.

This era also saw the growth of European power and influence. In the Middle Ages, Europe had been overshadowed by the ancient civilizations of Asia. By the end of the 18th century, however, Europe had emerged as a dominant force. Europe's cultural influence began to spread around the world. This process of westernization—the spread of European ideas and values—would become a defining feature of the modern era to come.

The Columbian Exchange

The trade between Europe and the Americas had consequences beyond just boosting European economies. It launched the Columbian Exchange, a two-way distribution of plants and animals named after Columbus. Until the arrival of Columbus, the peoples of the Americas were isolated from the rest of the world. That isolation meant that they had no immunity to European diseases. But it also meant that many of their plants and animals were unique to the Americas.

Europeans took a special interest in American food plants. These included maize (corn), potatoes, beans, squashes, pumpkins, peanuts, avocados, tomatoes, chili peppers, and cocoa. Merchants carried these to Europe and, from there, to Africa and Asia. Over time, these plants helped increase food production and improve the diets of people around the world.

The Columbian Exchange also brought new plants and animals into the “new world” from the “old world.” Peaches, oranges, bananas, sugarcane, coffee, oats, and wheat all became important crops in the Americas. Europeans also introduced beasts of burden and new sources of protein in the form of horses, cattle, pigs, goats, and sheep. European agriculture and the grazing needs of horses, cattle, and sheep had a great impact on the natural environment. Much land was converted from forest to farm and pasture.

Some historians include people, along with their customs and ideas, in the Columbian Exchange. Around 1.4 million Europeans and more than five times that many Africans had migrated to the Americas by 1800.

In Latin America the intermixing of Europeans, Africans, and Indians created a distinctive colonial society. That society was stratified, or formed into classes, according to place of origin, race, skin color, and other factors. At the top of the social pyramid stood those born in Europe. The lower classes included Indians, Africans, and people of mixed blood.

A different kind of class structure evolved in colonial North America. Its basis was economic, with white merchants and planters at the top of the social hierarchy. Within the colonies, Indians and Africans had little, if any, social prestige or political power.



Absolutism and the Growth of State Power

As the world expanded, the power of states and empires also grew. New state systems took greater control over people and territories. This growth of state power was evident in Europe and across much of Asia.

In western Europe, powerful monarchs began to take control in the 1500s. Previously, feudal lords and the Catholic Church had limited the power of kings and queens. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, however, many monarchs centralized power and authority under their rule. Because these rulers had absolute power, their form of rule was known as absolutism.

Absolute monarchs claimed that their right to rule came from God, a concept known as divine right. This notion of God-given authority was not new. In China, rulers had long claimed the Mandate of Heaven to support their rule. A Chinese emperor who governed poorly could lose this mandate, however, and be overthrown. In contrast, European monarchs argued that any attempt to remove them or limit their power was against God's will. In their view, the ruler and the state were inseparable. King Louis XIV of France expressed this belief when he reportedly said, "L'etat, c'est moi," meaning "I am the state."

European monarchies backed up their rule with military force because nation-states wanted to secure their borders and sometimes expand them. They used new weaponry based on gunpowder technology adopted from China. They developed cannons for use on land and sea. They created trained, professional armies that relied on guns rather than pikes and spears. They also designed new fortifications to resist artillery attacks.

These advances, known as the gunpowder revolution, had a major impact on warfare. They also cost a lot of money. European rulers paid for their new military power with taxes, bank loans, and the wealth gained from global trade and commerce. During this period, the most powerful European states spent an increasing share of their revenues on the military. This commercializing of warfare was a key factor in the gunpowder revolution.

The gunpowder revolution also took place in eastern Europe and Asia. Strong states used gunpowder weapons to conquer territory and build large, land-based empires. These "gunpowder empires" arose across Eurasia, from Russia, Turkey, and Persia to India and East Asia.

The Ottoman Turks built one of the most powerful empires. Spreading out from Anatolia (what is now Turkey) in the 1300s, they conquered southeastern Europe and the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East. By 1550 they dominated a region stretching from the Balkans to the Persian Gulf and the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

The Ottoman conquests relied on well-trained armies and heavy artillery. During the siege of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans battered the city's walls with huge cannons. The largest was reported to be more than 26 feet long, weighed 25 tons, and fired stone balls up to 1,500 pounds in weight. No city's defenses could withstand such an assault for long.

The Ottomans created a centralized state to support their empire. They used an efficient bureaucracy of government officials to manage the state and enforce its laws. With their successful military and state organization, the Ottomans maintained a strong empire into the 1700s.

To the north, Russia also built a powerful state and empire. Expanding outward from Moscow in the 1400s, Russian rulers conquered the surrounding territory and then pushed into Central Asia. By 1700, Russia occupied lands extending all the way to China and the Pacific Ocean. Russian czars, or emperors, modernized the army and ruled with absolute power. In the late 1500s, a British diplomat described the cruel force exercised by Czar Ivan IV, commonly known as Ivan the Terrible:

To show his sovereignty over the lives of his subjects, the late emperor Ivan Vasilevich, in his walk or progresses, if he disliked the face or person of any man whom he met by the way, or that looked upon him, would command his head to be struck off. Which was presently done, and the head cast before him.

—Ambassador Giles Fletcher, quoted in *The European Emergence*

In Persia (what is now Iran), the Safavid Empire arose during this era. Between 1501 and 1722, the rulers of the Safavid Empire used gunpowder weaponry to control the lands between the Ottoman Empire to the west and India to the east. Unlike the Ottomans, who were Sunni Muslims, the Safavids were followers of Shi'a Islam. Under their greatest ruler, Shah Abbas, they built a strong, centralized state. They promoted the arts and built a splendid capital at Isfahan.

During the same period, Muslim invaders from Central Asia took power in India and established the Mughal Empire, which lasted from 1526 to 1707. The Mughals defeated much larger Indian armies by using firearms and cannons. Eventually they gained control over most of the Indian subcontinent. They established an effective government and grew rich from the trade in cotton cloth and spices. Under their rule, the economy and culture of India flourished.

East Asian states also increased their power during this era. In China, the Ming dynasty ruled until 1644, when it fell to Manchu invaders from the north. The Manchus formed the Qing dynasty and expanded the Chinese empire. They maintained China's economic prosperity, while restricting European access to Chinese trade. Between 1400 and 1800, the Chinese population more than quadrupled, to around 330 million, or one third of the world's population. During this period, the Chinese traded with the Americas. New foods brought to China provided more calories than foods from Europe, causing a population boom.

In the 1500s, Japan also built a centralized state under strong military rulers, called shoguns. The shoguns used guns to defeat local lords and unify the country. They founded the Tokugawa Shogunate, which brought more than two centuries of peace and stability to Japan. The Tokugawa rulers maintained tight control and isolated Japan from most foreign contact.

Despite their success, most of the gunpowder empires had declined by the late 1700s. The Safavid Empire had collapsed, and the Ottoman and Mughal empires were failing. Even Qing China was showing signs of weakness. Asia remained prosperous, with the largest economies and populations in the world. But Asia's power was beginning to fade.

In contrast, Europe was getting stronger. Several interrelated factors help account for Europe's rising power by the late 18th century. A major factor was the Commercial Revolution. This was the rapid expansion of business, fueled by overseas trade and colonization. European colonial powers, particularly Spain and Portugal, exploited the resources and markets of their overseas colonies. Other countries, such as Britain and Holland, devised new methods of business and banking. These changes gave rise to capitalism, an economic system based on private enterprise. As commercial activity spread throughout Europe, living standards rose and wealth increased. This new wealth, in turn, enhanced the military and political power of European states.

Europe was in a good position to benefit from the Commercial Revolution. Its states and societies were younger than those of Asia, and its social, political, and economic structures were more flexible. As commerce increased, merchants and bankers took on more power in society and politics. The rise of capitalism began to affect work patterns, social classes, and many other aspects of European life.

Ideas and culture were changing too. During this era, new ways of looking at the world swept across Europe. These ideas ranged from new religious beliefs to the secular, or non-religious, principles of science. All these factors—economic, political, social, and cultural—helped propel Europe's rise to power.

The Renaissance

In 1550, the Italian artist Giorgio Vasari wrote a book, *The Lives of the Artists*. In it, he praised the revival of classical Greek and Roman culture occurring in Italy at the time. Vasari contrasted this cultural flowering with the “darkness” of the Middle Ages after the fall of Rome. Historians would later refer to this age of cultural revival as the Renaissance, a French word meaning “rebirth.”

Historians generally date the Renaissance to the period from 1300 to 1600. In fact, the Renaissance did not start or end at a particular time. Nor did it represent a clear break with the past. Many of the changes that took place during this period had their roots in the late Middle Ages.

By 1300, Europe was moving out of the feudal age. Increased trade and commerce were generating new wealth, prosperity, and urban growth. Universities in Paris, Oxford, and other cities had emerged as centers of higher learning. National monarchies and city-states were gaining more power. The Catholic Church was still a dominant force, but it was losing some of its control over cultural and political life.

During the 1300s, wars and the bubonic plague—the Black Death—caused great turmoil in Europe. These events devastated whole regions and populations and shrank the labor force. But they also helped destroy feudalism and create new possibilities for change. One of those changes was the growth of urban workshops that made use of new, laborsaving devices. The skilled artisans who worked in these small industries produced a wide range of luxury goods and machinery. From this artisan class came many of the craft workers, artists, architects, and other creative individuals who powered the Renaissance.

The Renaissance began in Italy, where conditions were ideal for a cultural resurgence. In 1300, much of Italy was controlled by city-states, such as Rome, Venice, Florence, and Milan. These city-states had grown rich from trade and commerce. Wealthy Italian merchants and bankers had money to spend on luxuries and works of art.

City-state rulers also sought to compete with their rivals by bringing artistic glory to their cities. Rich patrons of the arts, such as the ruling Medici family of Florence, offered financial support to writers and artists. Education also became more important, as the demands of business and government called for more literate people versed in accounting and law.

Other factors played a part, too. Italy had long been engaged in trade across the Mediterranean. This foreign contact gave Italians a greater awareness of the world. The Italian people were also surrounded by the remains of classical Rome. This heritage helped stimulate interest in the past. This interest was enhanced by contacts with the Byzantine Empire, where much classical scholarship was preserved. During the 1300s and 1400s, many Byzantine scholars moved to Italy to escape the growing threat of the Ottoman Empire. They brought a large body of knowledge with them.

Although Renaissance thinkers sought to revive classical culture, this culture had never really disappeared in Europe. The Catholic Church had preserved the works of Plato, Aristotle, and other ancient philosophers, but it interpreted their work from a Christian perspective. What the Renaissance thinkers did was return to the original sources and read them in a new, non-religious light.

In reviving classical thought, the artists and writers of the Renaissance were guided by humanism. This philosophy balanced religious faith with a secular point of view. It emphasized the dignity and worth of the individual. As humanists, the Renaissance thinkers studied classical art and literature for their insights into human life, rather than spiritual matters.

The first great writer of the Italian Renaissance was Dante Alighieri. His greatest work, *The Divine Comedy*, is an epic poem that describes the author’s imaginary journey through the afterlife. Dante was the first well-known author to write in both classical Latin and the Italian vernacular, or native language. He promoted the use of Italian to make learning more available to a wider audience.

Two great humanists followed in Dante’s footsteps. Francesco Petrarca—known as Petrarch—wrote lyrical poetry, also in Italian. He scoured libraries across Europe for classical works and brought them to wider attention. A second great writer was Giovanni Boccaccio. His most famous work, *The Decameron*, tells the story of ten young people who flee Florence to escape the plague. While away, they tell stories to pass the time. The book appealed to many Italian readers, though the church did not like its liberal approach to the younger generation.

Another writer, Niccolò Machiavelli, wrote books with political themes. His best-known work, *The Prince*, offered highly practical advice to rulers. For example, he wrote that a ruler should always be ready for war. “Once princes have given more thought to personal pleasures than to arms,” he wrote, “they have lost their domain.” He also wrote that it is more important for a ruler to be feared than to be loved. Although Machiavelli’s advice may seem harsh for a Renaissance humanist, his realistic approach matched the secular spirit of the time.

The Italian Renaissance also produced an extraordinary outpouring of art. Renaissance painters mastered the art of perspective, giving visual depth to their work. Sculptors working in stone revived the realism of classical Greek sculpture. Three of the greatest Italian artists were Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael.

Leonardo was a true “Renaissance man,” a person who is skilled at many different things. He was a painter, sculptor, architect, and engineer. He is perhaps most famous for his painting the *Mona Lisa*, a portrait of a woman with a mysterious smile. But he also made thousands of drawings of human anatomy, plants and animals, mechanical devices, and weapons. He even designed a flying machine, centuries before airplanes were invented.

Michelangelo was a brilliant artist who depicted the human body in astonishing detail. His greatest masterpiece is the painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, which shows scenes from the Bible. His stone sculptures *La Pietà* and *David* are also remarkable for their realism.

Raphael emphasized balance and composition in his paintings. One of his greatest works, the *School of Athens*, shows philosophers from ancient Greece alongside artists and thinkers of the Renaissance. It reflects the humanist devotion to classical ideals.

By the mid-1400s, the Renaissance was spreading to other parts of Europe, particularly northern Europe. Cities in Germany, France, Great Britain, Holland, and Flanders (modern-day Belgium) were beginning to grow and prosper after decades of disease and warfare. These cities became fertile ground for Renaissance ideas, spread through the new medium of the printing press. Northern writers and artists also traveled to Italy to study, and Italians came north. As a result, Renaissance art and humanism took hold in northern Europe.

Northern humanists maintained their Christian faith, but they also wrote works critical of the church and society. The greatest of the Christian humanists was the Dutch writer Desiderius Erasmus. In his most famous work, *The Praise of Folly*, written in 1509, Erasmus criticized corruption and abuses in the Catholic Church.

A few years later, in 1516, the Englishman Sir Thomas More published his famous book *Utopia*. This visionary work describes an ideal society governed by reason, rather than the power of kings or popes, where all property is shared and people enjoy equal rights.

The greatest writer of the Northern Renaissance was William Shakespeare, who lived from 1564 to 1616. The themes of classical culture and humanism are evident in many of his plays, including *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare’s interest in the ways of the world and his love of vernacular English mark him as a true Renaissance man.

Great artists of the period included Albrecht Dürer, Jan van Eyck, and Pieter Bruegel. Dürer was a German artist who studied in Italy and mastered the use of perspective. Van Eyck and Bruegel were both Flemish painters. Van Eyck advanced the Flemish technique of oil painting, which gave his work a rich, luminous quality. Bruegel is famous for his scenes of Flemish peasant life.

At times, the values expressed in Renaissance art and literature provoked tensions with the Catholic Church. The church had long regarded itself as the guardian and interpreter of knowledge and culture. But that position was challenged by the secular philosophy of humanism, which advanced the classical Greek idea that “man is the measure of all things.” Humanist philosophy suggested that individuals could understand the world for themselves and even question church teachings. It implied that individuals were free to make their own moral and ethical choices. These ideas undermined church authority.

Nevertheless, most Renaissance thinkers remained faithful Christians. Although they might embrace humanism and criticize church practices, they did not question the basic tenets of Christian religion. In fact, humanist thinkers like Erasmus promoted the search for a deeper spiritual experience. This quest for a more meaningful faith would lead to a major transformation of Christianity during the 1500s.

The Reformation

In October 1517, a Catholic scholar in Germany named Martin Luther wrote a letter to the archbishop of Mainz (a German city). In the letter, he criticized church corruption and called for reforms. Luther's views were spread in printed pamphlets and soon sparked a religious revolt. Many protesters left the Catholic Church and formed new Christian religious movements. This became known as the Reformation.

For centuries, the Catholic Church had commanded the loyalty and faith of most Europeans. But over time, problems had arisen within the church. Although priests took a vow of poverty, the pope and other high officials lived in wealth and luxury. Some Catholic clergy had wives and children, despite their vows of celibacy. Local priests were often poorly educated. Many were illiterate and barely understood the Bible. The church also engaged in corrupt practices, including selling church positions and charging for services. The church even sold pardons, known as indulgences, which released sinners from punishment.

Critics had called attention to these problems in the past. In the late 1300s, Oxford professor John Wycliffe criticized the wealth and immorality of church officials. Another critic, the Czech preacher Jan Hus, called for an end to church corruption. In 1415, Hus was burned at the stake for heresy, or holding religious beliefs that contradict the teachings of the church. Christian humanists like Erasmus and More had also mocked superstitions and false doctrines taught by the church.

Luther echoed these concerns, but he did not mean to start a revolt. Instead, he hoped to prompt a debate within the church. His initial complaint was over the selling of indulgences. But his real aim was to restore purity to the church. He believed that rituals like confession and praying to the saints did not bring salvation, as the church claimed. He argued that salvation came from faith alone, and that the Bible was the only source of religious truth. "One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life," he wrote. "That one thing is the holy Word of God." Luther argued that believers did not need priests to show them the truth. He said that any Christian could read the Bible and understand God's message.

Luther's ideas did not sit well with church leaders. They regarded his views as heresy and a threat to church authority. In 1520, Pope Leo X demanded that Luther retract his teachings, on pain of excommunication, or expulsion from a church or religious community. Luther refused and was expelled from the church. He soon went into hiding to avoid punishment. But he continued to write and publish his work, which was printed and circulated throughout Europe.

Luther and his followers formed the Lutheran Church, a new branch of Christianity. Lutheran ministers simplified church services and rituals and preached in German rather than Latin. Many Germans abandoned Catholicism in favor of the new Lutheran faith.

At the time, Germany was part of the Holy Roman Empire, a state that also included parts of France, Italy, and central Europe. The German territories enjoyed considerable self-rule within the empire, however. Some of their ruling princes defied the emperor, Charles V, and sided with Luther. They became known as Protestants for their protests against the Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, other Protestant groups arose in different parts of Europe. Switzerland was a major focus of reform activity. In Zurich, Huldrych Zwingli, a Catholic priest inspired by Luther's ideas, founded a new religious denomination. His Reformed Church emphasized Bible study and banned all images and music from church services.

In Geneva, the reformer John Calvin founded an even stricter denomination. Calvin emphasized the values of thrift, hard work, and the rejection of worldly pleasures. Members who did not uphold these values were excommunicated. Calvin also stressed the notion of predestination. This is the idea that some people are chosen by God for salvation. Calvin's church gained followers throughout Europe—in France, the Netherlands, Germany, and England. His ideas later had a major impact on religion in British North America.

England also underwent its own Reformation. In 1534, King Henry VIII formed the Church of England, also called the Anglican Church. Henry broke with the Catholic Church because it refused to grant him a divorce from his wife, but also because he wanted to claim power over the church—and its wealth—in England.

The spread of Protestant religion provoked conflicts across Europe. In Germany, Protestant and Catholic states fought a series of bitter wars that lasted for a century, until the mid-1600s. Religious wars and persecutions also ravaged France, the Netherlands, and other countries. Only Italy, Spain, and Portugal remained outside Protestant influence. Eventually, it became custom that the ruler of each state would choose the religion of his people. This led to the migrations of many believers to more hospitable lands.

To meet the challenges of the Reformation, the Catholic Church began its own campaign of reform and renewal. This movement is known as the Counter-Reformation.

The church took a number of steps to defend Catholicism. In 1545, it began a series of meetings known as the Council of Trent. This council defined Catholic doctrine and called for needed reforms. One reform was to end the sale of indulgences. Another was to improve education for priests. The council also imposed more rigid discipline on Catholics, making church attendance mandatory and banning certain books. These and other changes helped establish more order and unity in the church.

The church also sought to increase its membership through renewed missionary activity and a more personal style of worship. It founded a new religious order, the Jesuits, to win Catholic converts in Europe and overseas. It also built lavish new churches, filled with magnificent art to inspire the faithful. This splendid style was designed to appeal to the emotions. It offered a stark contrast to the simple, severe quality of Protestant religion.

The Counter-Reformation helped revive the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, by the 1600s the Reformation had changed the face of Europe. The continent was no longer united around the Catholic religion. Rulers claimed more freedom from religious authority. Europeans were also more educated and literate, thanks to the Protestant emphasis on Bible study and the effects of the printing press. Although Europe remained highly religious, these changes encouraged secular trends in European society.