

The Protestant Reformation

Catholic Church

Today when you drive through Charlotte, or any other part of the world, you'll see all kinds of churches. There are Catholic churches, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, non-denominational, and many other churches as well. The word "catholic" literally means universal, or all over the world. In 1500 A.D. there was only one type of Christian church in Western Europe, the Catholic church, led by the Pope who lived in Vatican City, in Italy.

When people went to church, they listened to the priest read from the Bible. Books were extremely rare because making them took so long, so most people didn't own a copy of the Bible themselves. The other problem was that most Bibles were written in Latin, a language that most people couldn't speak, let alone read. Only the very rich could afford the education to learn to read their own language, let alone Latin.

The church was very powerful, sometimes even more powerful than the king of a country. The reason was because people believed what was taught in the church. The problem was, because most people couldn't read the Bible, they had to trust what they were taught by the priests and leaders of the church. This allowed the church to use religion to control a lot of people's lives.



If you can't read the Bible above, you would have fit right in during the Renaissance. Over 90% of people couldn't read or speak Latin and had to trust a priest to translate and read it for them.

The Spanish Inquisition



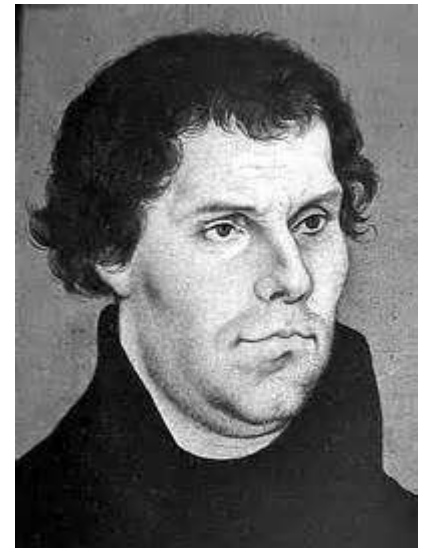
Burning heretics at the stake was a way for the Inquisition to make a public statement.

The Spanish Inquisition was an example of how the church and government of a country worked together against people living in a country. During the centuries leading up to the 15th century, Spain had been controlled by different Muslim groups and also had a high Jewish population. Once the Spanish monarchy officially took over, backed by the Roman Catholic Church, they began to aggressively try to get rid of all religions from their country, except Christianity. This began what is popularly known as the Spanish Inquisition. During the time of its existence, the Spanish Inquisition's job was to try to find all non-Christians and get them to confess to not being Christians. Once they had a confession, the Inquisition would either kick them out of the country, make them a slave, whip them in public, or kill them (normally by burning them at the stake.) If a person refused to confess, they were often tortured. Confessions made during torture were accepted as being truth, and never because the person wanted the torture to stop.

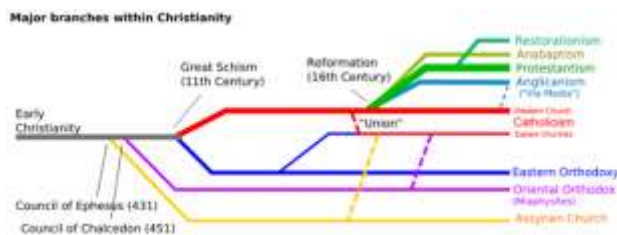
Martin Luther

Martin Luther was a German priest who began to disagree with the church leadership, particularly with the pope, Pope Leo X. Martin Luther was from a rich family, and was on his way to becoming a lawyer when he decided instead to become a priest. Luther was terrified that despite becoming a monk and priest, his soul was still in danger and he would not be saved from God's judgment.

Martin Luther's biggest problem with the church was their sale of indulgences. From time to time, in order to raise money, the church would sell indulgences to people. The church told the people that an indulgence was literally a "get out of judgment free" card. This would enable family members to buy salvation for themselves and their family members, even those who had already died. Martin Luther strongly disagreed with this practice, and posted his now famous 95 Thesis on the door of the Catholic church in Wittenberg.



Luther's commitment to his principles was a large factor in Dr. King changing his name.



When discussing different religions, it is important to recognize that Catholics, Protestants, and many other denominations all fall into the title of "Christianity." Christianity includes all religions that believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

Renaissance period. Henry VIII of England switched his country's official religion because he wanted to divorce his current wife, who was not giving him any male children to continue the royal line. When the Catholic Church refused to grant the divorce, Henry VIII switched churches in order to get the divorce he wanted. The Protestants themselves went on to disagree with one another, and formed many different types of Christian churches, known as denominations. While there are many differences, typically speaking, the biggest difference between a Catholic and a Protestant is that Catholics accept the Pope as their leader, and believe that he speaks for God on the earth, while Protestants typically use only the Bible as God's word, and do not accept the authority of the Pope.

Martin Luther continued to challenge the power of the pope, until he was finally excommunicated (kicked out of the church) in 1521 for heresy.

This conflict led to the formation of what is now known as the Protestant churches, so called because they were formed in protest against certain Catholic church beliefs. The Catholic Church continued to be the official religion of every European monarchy except the English throughout the

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What is the difference between Catholics and Protestants?
2. Why does the Spanish Inquisition have a bad reputation?
3. Why did people buy indulgences?

Write about it.

Why do churches in general have so much less power in America today than they had in Europe in 1500? Is this a good thing, or a bad thing? Why?