

Empires: Belief Systems

Paris is well worth a Mass.

—Henry of Navarre, King of France (ruled 1589–1610)

Essential Question: How did different belief systems endure or change during the period from 1450–1750?

Religion, a key factor in the expansion of empires, was a divisive force as much as it was a unifying one. Christianity remained a dominant force in Europe, but its split into several factions during the 16th and 17th centuries led to significant historical changes. French King Henry IV, often known as Henry of Navarre, converted to Catholicism in 1593 for the sake of solidifying his power and ensuring peace, as the quote above suggests. His action demonstrates the willingness of monarchs to approach ruling with practicality rather than theology. Henry IV also sanctioned religious toleration of the Huguenots (French Calvinists).

Islam, too, experienced a split, and political rivalries between the Ottoman and Safavid empires deepened the breach between the Sunni and Shi'a branches of the religion. At the same time, Sikhism provided a way to combine Hindu and Sufi Muslim beliefs.

Protestant Reformation

The Roman Catholic Church faced many challenges in the European shift from feudalism to centralized governments. International in organization and influence and boasting a large bureaucracy of its own, the Church was subject to corruption. Efforts to curb corruption resulted in numerous Church councils and reform movements. However, efforts at reform were unsuccessful.

Theological disagreements began to surface as well. John Wycliffe and the Lollards in England in the late 14th century argued that priests were unnecessary for salvation. Wycliffe was vilified for translating parts of the Bible into the English vernacular to make it available to the mass of believers, who neither read nor understood Latin. In the early 14th century, Hussites, followers of Jan Hus in Bohemia, were declared heretics for beliefs similar to Wycliffe's. Hus himself was burned at the stake. Huldrych Zwingli campaigned in Geneva for a religion that would follow the exact teachings

of the scriptures and discard customs that had evolved later. For example, he opposed the requirement for celibacy of the clergy because he argued that the rule was imposed long after the scriptures were written.

The power of the Church suffered during the so-called Babylonian Captivity (1309–1377), when the papacy was located in France rather than in Rome. The Captivity gave French rulers greater influence over the Church, even the ability to decide who should be pope. Newly centralizing rulers who coveted Church lands and authority began confiscating wealthy Catholic monasteries and sometimes established their own churches. In the eyes of believers, the Church suffered further when it failed to stop the Black Death. (Connect: Write a paragraph connecting the Reformation with the problems of the medieval Church. See Topic 1.6.)

Lutheranism A monk named **Martin Luther** in Wittenberg, a German city in the Holy Roman Empire (800–1806), concluded that several traditional Church practices violated biblical teachings. He objected to the sale of **indulgences**, which granted a person absolution from the punishments for sin, and to **simony**, the selling of church offices. As a result, Luther defiantly challenged the Church by nailing his charges, the **95 Theses**, to a church door. Luther advocated for the theological stance of “sola fide,” faith alone, for the basis of salvation for the Christian believer.

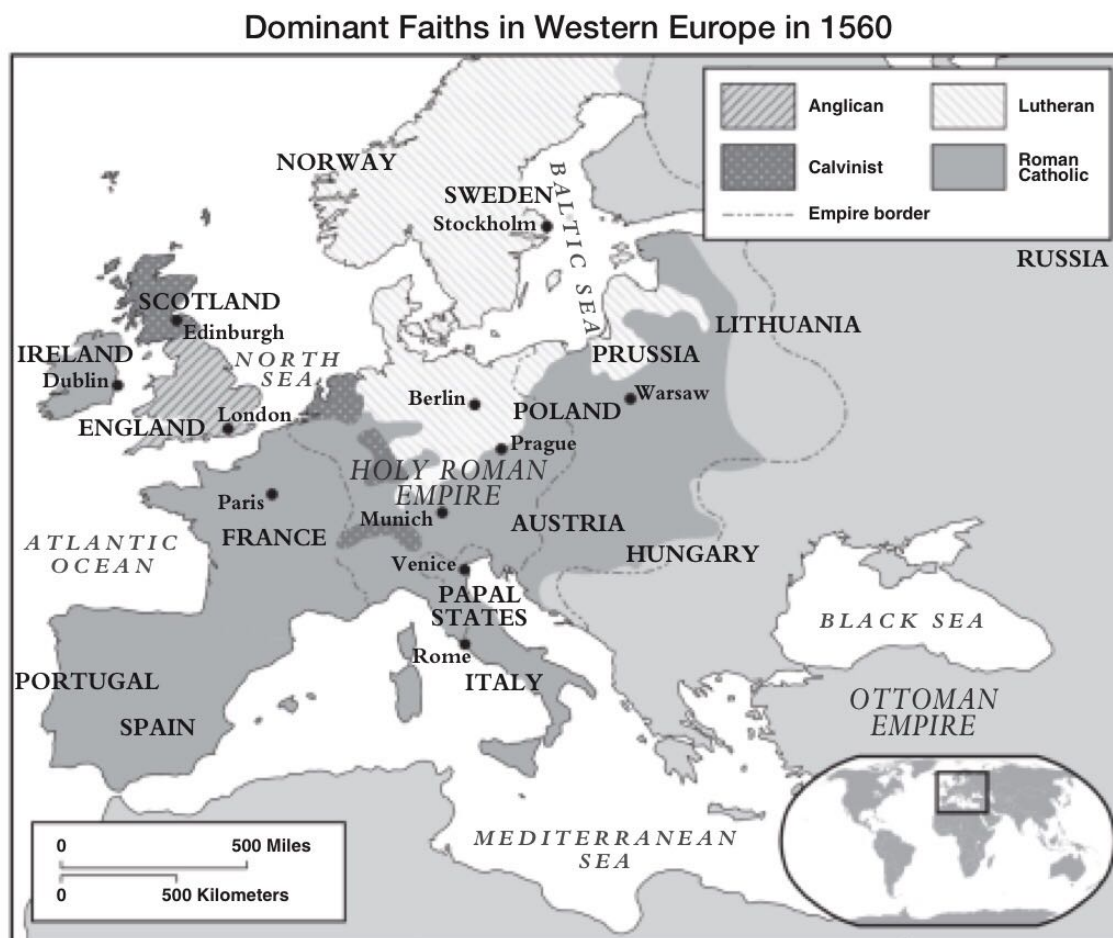
The Church reacted harshly. It, and the local political ruler, needed the money these practices generated. Luther persisted. In January 1521, Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther. Several German political leaders saw an opportunity to free themselves from the power of the pope. They sided with Luther. Soon, what had begun as a minor academic debate became a major split in the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire.

Luther was not a political or social revolutionary. (When German peasants rebelled, he did not support them.) But his theological ideas had social impact on the clergy as well as on women. Luther taught that women could have direct access to God just as men could. Luther’s emphasis promoted women’s literacy. He believed that women had significant roles in the family, particularly teaching their children to read the Bible. However, Protestants generally did not organize convents. As a result, Protestant women did not have the opportunity to become leaders in a vital institution the way Roman Catholic women did.

Calvinism The French theologian **John Calvin** broke with the Catholic Church around 1530. In 1536, he authored *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* and helped reform the religious community in Geneva, Switzerland. The **elect**, those **predestined** to go to heaven, ran the community, which was based on plain living, simple church buildings, and governance by the elders of the church. Calvin’s followers in France were called Huguenots. Other offshoots of Calvinism included the Reformed Church of Scotland, led by John Knox, and the **Puritans** in England and later in Boston, who wanted to purify the Church of England of Catholic remnants. Historian and sociologist Max Weber pointed out that an important socioeconomic impact



of Calvinism is contained in the phrase “Protestant work ethic.” Calvinists were encouraged to work hard and reinvest their profits; prosperity ostensibly showed that God favored their obedience and hard work. Prosperity also indicated their position among the elect. Calvinists viewed their work ethic as righteous living that elevated them to positions of secular leadership. Together, the various reform efforts are known as the **Protestant Reformation**.



Anglicanism The last of the three major figures of the Reformation was England’s King **Henry VIII** (ruled 1509–1547). Henry wanted a male heir to succeed him. After his wife gave birth to several daughters, Henry asked the pope to annul his marriage so he could marry another woman, **Anne Boleyn**. But the pope refused out of worry over the reaction of **Charles V**, the powerful emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Henry, with the approval of the English Parliament, set himself up as head of the new Church of England, or **Anglican Church**—one that would be free of control by the pope in Rome.

The Orthodox Church and Reforms in Russia

Charles V had revitalized the concept of the universal monarchy and spent most of his reign defending the integrity of the Holy Roman Empire from the Protestant Reformation. Like Charles V, Peter the Great of Russia asserted his authority as he moved against the Orthodox Church. The Church had long been the force unifying the Russian people and the tsars, who claimed to rule

by divine right. Peter confirmed his power over the Church by abolishing the position of patriarch, the head of the Church, and incorporating the Church into the government. In place of the patriarch, he established the **Holy Synod**, composed of clergymen overseen by a secular official who answered to the tsar. Peter raised the minimum age for men to become eligible to be monks to 50, preferring that the young serve first as soldiers. Peter's reforms were not welcomed by many peasants and Old Believers, a sect that opposed earlier reforms.

Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation

The Roman Catholic Church, all-powerful in Europe since the fall of Rome, did not sit quietly by and let the Reformation groups take over. Instead, it embarked on a vigorous **Counter-Reformation** to fight against the Protestant attacks. A three-pronged strategy yielded such gains for the Church that it remains the largest Christian denomination in the world:

- The Church increased the use of the **Inquisition**, which had been established in the late 12th century to root out and punish nonbelievers. The Inquisition sometimes allowed the use of torture to achieve its ends.
- The **Jesuits**, or Society of Jesus, a religious order founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, also opposed the spread of Protestantism. The Jesuits undertook missionary activity throughout the Spanish Empire as well as in Japan and India.
- The **Council of Trent** (1545–1563) corrected some of the worst of the Church's abuses and concentrated on reaffirming the rituals such as marriage and other sacraments improving the education of priests. The Council also published the *Index of Prohibited Books*, a list of writings that the Church banned, including Protestant copies of the Bible and the writings of Copernicus.

The Counter-Reformation was successful in that Catholicism remained predominant in the areas of Western Europe near the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, later colonies of the European powers often followed the lead of the home country in religion. Therefore, most of the people in the Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonies became Catholic.

Charles V abdicated as ruler of the Holy Roman Empire in 1555, discouraged by his inability to stop the spread of Lutheranism. He left Spain to his son **Philip II** and the Holy Roman Empire to his brother Ferdinand. Philip II took the Catholic crusade to the Netherlands and ruled its 17 provinces from 1556 to 1581. He later tried to conquer and convert England. In 1588, his **Spanish Armada** was defeated by English naval power.

Wars of Religion

Europe's religious divisions led to frequent wars. In 1546 and 1547, the forces of Charles V fought the German Lutheran Schmalkaldic League. Conflict between Lutherans and the Holy Roman Empire resulted in the 1555 **Peace of Augsburg**, which allowed each German state to choose whether its ruler would be Catholic or Lutheran. As a result, churches and inhabitants were forced to practice the state religion. People who refused could move to another state where their preferred religion was practiced.

France In France, Catholics and Huguenots fought for nearly half a century. Then, in 1593, King Henry IV, who had been raised as a Protestant, tried to unify the country by becoming a Catholic, reportedly saying that "Paris is well worth a Mass." Five years later, in another step to bring peace, Henry issued the **Edict of Nantes**, which allowed the Huguenots to practice their faith. The edict provided religious toleration in France for the next 87 years. In 1685, Louis XIV of France issued the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. As a result, France experienced social and economic effects. For example, many skilled craftsmen left France, taking knowledge of important industry techniques and styles with them.

Thirty Years' War The final great religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Europe culminated in the **Thirty Years' War** (1618–1648), which led to economic catastrophe for most of the continent. The Thirty Years' War was initially the result of religious conflict within the Holy Roman Empire; it gradually developed into a more general conflict involving European powers. Much of the destruction was caused by troops who were allowed to loot as part of their compensation. The war resulted in widespread famine, starvation, and disease.

The war culminated in the **Peace of Westphalia**, which allowed each area of the Holy Roman Empire to select one of three religious options: Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Calvinism. After this settlement, France, Spain, and Italy were predominantly Catholic. Northern Europe was either Lutheran or Calvinist. England was Protestant with a state church.

Allowing rulers of various areas of the Holy Roman Empire to choose a denomination had important political effects. It gave the countries and duchies much more autonomy than they previously had. Consequently, the states of Prussia (now part of Germany) and Austria began to assert themselves, although they still formally belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. Prussia, after suffering tremendous destruction during the Thirty Years' War, developed a strong military to protect itself. The Prussian military tradition would become a key factor in European politics into the 20th century.



Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, 1450–1750			
	Ottoman Empire	Safavid Empire	Mughal Empire
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly Sunni with some measure of tolerance under Suleiman • Less tolerance under later rulers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly Shi'a • No tolerance; Ismail I made conversion mandatory for Sunni population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance under Akbar, but his blend of Islam and Hinduism did not prove popular • Less tolerance under later rulers

Islamic Religious Schisms

As in the Holy Roman Empire, religion and the state were closely tied in Islamic empires. Islam continued to be an enduring belief system, spreading its sphere of influence despite factions that developed within it.

Ottoman Empire Until 1453, much of the area had been controlled by the Byzantine Empire and followed the Eastern Orthodox religion. After the siege of Constantinople, the area became Ottoman and the dominant religion became Islam. A sultan replaced the emperor, and the Byzantine Empire’s Justinian Law was replaced by **shariah**. This is a strict Islamic legal system that deals with all aspects of life, such as criminal justice, marital laws, and issues of inheritance.

The Safavids Using Shi’a Islam as a unifying force, Shah Ismail built a power base that supported his rule and denied legitimacy to any Sunni. This strict adherence to Shi’a Islam caused frequent hostilities within the Ottoman Empire.

Mughal Toleration and Prosperity Akbar tolerated all religions. He gave money or land to Hindus and Muslims. He also gave money for a Catholic church in Goa, on India’s southwest coast. He provided land grants for the relatively new religion of **Sikhism**, which developed from Hinduism and may have been influenced by the Islamic mysticism known as Sufism. (See Topics 1.2 and 1.3.) Sikhism, a monotheistic faith that recognized the rights of other faiths to exist, became the fifth most popular religion in the world by the 21st century. Akbar tried to ease tensions between Hindus and Muslims. He gave Hindus positions in his government—zamindars of high and low positions could be Hindu—and married Hindu wives. He exempted Hindus from poll taxes paid by non-Muslims in the empire. Because he enjoyed religious discussions, Akbar invited Catholic priests to Delhi to explain Christianity to him.

Regarded as one of the world’s outstanding rulers, Akbar encouraged learning, art, architecture, and literature. He tried (and failed) to prohibit child marriages and sati, the ritual in which widows killed themselves by jumping on the funeral pyres of their husbands. He died in 1605 without successfully converting his Hindu and Islamic subjects to the religion called Din-i Ilahi, or “divine faith,” which he had promoted to reconcile Hinduism and Islam.



Religious Schisms Through History			
Religion and Region	Schism	Leaders	Nature of Dispute
Buddhism in India	Theravada and Mahayana (approximately 300 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four councils held after the Buddha's death 	Disagreement between emphasis on personal meditation (Theravada) and public rituals and compassion (Mahayana)
Islam in Middle East	Sunni and Shi'a (632 C.E.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abu Bakr • Ali 	Disagreement over the rightful successor to Muhammad as leader of the Islamic community
Christianity in Europe and Byzantine Empire	Roman Catholics and Orthodox (1054 C.E.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope Leo IX • Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius 	Disagreement over the role of faith, issues of salvation. Disagreement over the authority of the pope and differences in rituals
Christianity in Europe	Roman Catholics and Protestants (1517 C.E.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin Luther • John Calvin • King Henry VIII 	Disagreements over the role of faith, the role of the clergy and the pope, and how to interpret the Bible

Scientific Revolution

In the early 1600s, scientific thinking gained popularity in northern Europe as trends in Renaissance ideas, curiosity, investigation, and discovery spread. In a period of religious schisms, scientific thought represented a very different kind of thinking—one based on reason rather than on faith—that would set in motion a monumental historical change. In 1620, English scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon developed an early scientific method called **empiricism**, which insisted upon the collection of data to back up a hypothesis. Bacon challenged traditional ideas that had been accepted for centuries and replace them with ones that could be demonstrated with evidence.

Scientific thinking advanced through the correspondence of leading scholars with one another, even during the religious wars, and by the establishment of a Royal Academy of Science in France and England. Sir Isaac Newton, combining Galileo's laws of terrestrial motion and Johannes Kepler's laws of planetary motion, published a work on gravitational force called *Principia* (1687). The ideas in *Principia* influenced science and mathematics and helped lead to a new vision of the world. Many intellectuals thought that science showed that the world was ordered and rational and that natural laws applied to the rational and orderly progress of governments and society. This thinking is a key to the Enlightenment (see Topic 5.1).

KEY TERMS BY THEME

GOVERNMENT: Europe

Henry VIII

Anne Boleyn

Charles V

Philip II

Spanish Armada

Peace of Augsburg

Edict of Nantes

Thirty Years' War

Peace of Westphalia

CULTURE: Catholicism

indulgences

simony

Holy Synod

Counter-Reformation

Inquisition

Jesuits

Council of Trent

CULTURE: Protestantism

Martin Luther

95 Theses

John Calvin

elect

predestined

Puritans

Protestant Reformation

Anglican Church

CULTURE: Islam

shariah

Sikhism

CULTURE: Science

empiricism