The Reformation: Religious or Political Revolution?

We will be discussing the following question: Did the Reformation change Europe more religiously or socially and politically?

Pre-Assignment:
1. Read the article about Reformation. (MARK THE TEXT) (25% of grade)
2. Complete the Following Chart: (25% of grade)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Religious Effects of the Reformation (At least 5)</th>
<th>Major Social and Political Effects of the Reformation: (At least 5)</th>
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3. On the back of this paper write a short response (in paragraph form) to the following Question: Did the Reformation change Europe more religiously or socially and politically?
   a. In your explanation: Include at least 3-5 of the best reasons from the text that support your position. (25% of grade)
   b. Be prepared to discuss the topic and defend your position.
4. Discussion Points will be given (25% of grade)
Did the Reformation change Europe more religiously or socially and politically?

...Seminar Discussion Questions

History is full of debatable positions and controversy. During the Socratic seminar you will be required to participate directly in at least 1 of the following discussions and take notes on the rest. You will have the opportunity to give indirect feedback on all of these topics and to discuss topics you are most passionate about. Keep these ideas and questions in mind as you read and prepare.

**Remember you will be scored on your ability to analyze and critique these controversial ideas with historical logic and support from the reading not what you opinion is about them.

1. Martin Luther is clearly the most influential Reformer to come out of the Reformation?
   a. Evaluate this statement, do you agree with it? Explain why or why not.

2. The political involvement of reformers like Luther, Zwingli, Knox, and Calvin prove that the Reformation was not primarily religious.
   a. Evaluate this statement, do you agree with it? Explain why or why not.

3. What was the most revolutionary religious teaching of the reformation?
   a. Use specific examples to support your thinking.

4. What were the most significant social and political changes caused by the Reformation?
   a. Use specific examples to support your thinking.

5. Do you think the Counter Reformation would have ever happened without the Reformation?
   a. Use specific examples to support your thinking.

6. What was the most important change the Reformation brought about?
   a. Use specific examples to support your thinking.

Final Question (All class): Did the Reformation change Europe more religiously or socially and politically?
The Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was the 16th-century religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheaval that splintered Catholic Europe, setting in place the structures and beliefs that would define the continent in the modern era. In northern and central Europe, reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Henry VIII challenged papal authority and questioned the Catholic Church's ability to define Christian practice. They argued for a religious and political redistribution of power into the hands of Bible- and pamphlet-reading pastors and princes. The disruption triggered wars, persecutions and the so-called Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church's delayed but forceful response to the Protestants.

Dating the Reformation

Historians usually date the start of the Protestant Reformation to the 1517 publication of Martin Luther's "95 Theses." Its ending can be placed anywhere from the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which allowed for the coexistence of Catholicism and Lutheranism in Germany, to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War. The key ideas of the Reformation—a call to purify the church and a belief that the Bible, not tradition, should be the sole source of spiritual authority—were not themselves novel. However, Luther and the other reformers became the first to skillfully use the power of the printing press to give their ideas a wide audience.

The Reformation: Germany and Lutheranism

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was an Augustinian monk and university lecturer in Wittenberg when he composed his “95 Theses,” which protested the pope's sale of reprieves from penance, or indulgences. Although he had hoped to spur renewal from within the church, in 1521 he was summoned before the Diet of Worms and excommunicated. Sheltered by Friedrich III, elector of Saxony, Luther translated the Bible into German and continued his output of vernacular pamphlets.

When German peasants, inspired in part by Luther's empowering "priesthood of all believers," revolted in 1524, Luther sided with Germany's princes. By the Reformation's end, Lutheranism had become the state religion throughout much of Germany, Scandinavia and the Baltics.

The Reformation: Switzerland

The Swiss Reformation began in 1519 with the sermons of Ulrich Zwingli, whose teachings largely paralleled Luther's. The Catholic Church taught that during communion, transubstantiation occurred; that is, the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ. Swiss priest Ulrich Zwingli disagreed; he claimed that the eucharist was merely a symbolic gesture commemorating the death of Christ. He rejected as profane the notion that material
objects could convey divine grace, which went against Luther's opinion that there was a real spiritual presence in the bread and wine. This disagreement led Luther to denounce Zwingli as the anti-Christ.

Zwingli, the son of free peasant farmers, had studied the classics in Basel and Berne and at the University of Vienna. By 1518, he was a parish priest in Zurich. Zwingli's youthful ideas were characteristic of the Christian humanism popularized by Desiderius Erasmus, and he was less spiritual and more commonsensical than Luther. He was definitely influenced by Luther's writings, though, and in 1518, he was also denouncing indulgences and superstitious pilgrimages. In 1522, Zwingli defended the consumption of meat during Lent and called on the bishops to sanction clerical marriage. By 1525, he had persuaded Zurich's city council to replace the Catholic mass with his own Order of Communion, a straightforward service of commemoration, with the laity partaking of both bread and wine. Zwingli died in 1531 defending Zurich against an attack by Catholics; Luther rejoiced in the downfall of his rival.

The Reformation: Anabaptists

The Anabaptists, a German Protestant sect, were even more radical than Zwingli. They believed that only an adult could commit their lives to follow Christ. Anabaptists rejected the validity of infant baptism and rebaptized adults. They refused to swear oaths or bear arms and believed in separation of church and state.

Luther himself was somewhat dismayed by the outburst of new religious movements, especially by the Peasant's War they engendered in 1524-1525. Lutheranism tended to appeal to townspeople; peasants preferred more radical beliefs, and nobility kept supporting the Catholic Crown. Still, during Luther's lifetime, a number of German nobles did embrace the new religion, and it had spread throughout northern Germany by the end of the 1520s. Protestant thinking appealed especially because of its simplicity; it was easy for a believer to understand what was expected of him or her once the tangle of Catholic bureaucracy was swept aside. The relationship people had with God changed radically; no longer was it necessary for them to communicate with the deity through the services of a priest.

The Reformation: Calvinism

John Calvin, a French Protestant, had intended to become a preacher but abandoned the plan in 1528 and became a lawyer instead; his extensive studies of Roman law enhanced his later skill at orderly argument and definition. Calvin was the son of a cathedral solicitor and accountant, and he himself had an excellent classical education. He was also influenced by humanist writings, as well as by Luther's work.

In 1532, Calvin stopped practicing law and instead began studying the classics more intently; in so doing, he experienced a sudden conversion to Protestant ideas. In 1533, fearing persecution for his beliefs, he fled Paris to Basel, Switzerland. In 1536, he published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. That work outlined laws for a community of believers called the "elect." It described the concept of predestination, whereby an omnipotent and inscrutable God decided to choose some people for everlasting bliss and others for everlasting deprivation from his presence—without regard for individual human performance. The redeeming mercy of Christ was the key to salvation. As for the eucharist, Calvin found a
middle ground between Luther and Zwingli; he believed that the reality of the sacrament was not within the physical bread and wine but that it was given to the communicant at the moment he or she received them.

In 1541 Calvin, who had spent the previous decade in exile writing his "Institutes of the Christian Religion," was invited to settle in Geneva and put his Reformed doctrine—which stressed God's power and humanity's predestined fate—into practice. The result was a theocratic (political and religious) regime of enforced, austere morality in Geneva.

Calvin's Geneva became a hotbed for other Protestant exiles. As exiles returned to their homes Calvin’s doctrines quickly spread to Scotland, France, Transylvania, Eastern Europe and the Low Countries, where Dutch Calvinism became a religious and economic force for the next 400 years.

Calvin had a great influence on the Scottish reformer John Knox, who brought Calvinism to Scotland; Scottish Calvinism became known as Presbyterianism. Knox, in contrast to Calvin, had no reservations about using force of arms to achieve religious ends. In addition, he took advantage of England's political plans to further his own religious ends: he allied himself with Queen Elizabeth I to eliminate the French Catholic influence in Scotland.

**The Reformation: England and the "Middle Way"**

In England, the Reformation began with Henry VIII's quest for a male heir. When Pope Clement VII refused to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon so he could remarry, the English king declared in 1534 that he alone should be the final authority in matters relating to the English church. Henry dissolved England's monasteries to confiscate their wealth and worked to place the Bible in the hands of the people. Beginning in 1536, every parish was required to have a copy.

After Henry's death, England tilted toward Calvinist-infused Protestantism during Edward VI's six-year reign and then endured five years of reactionary Catholicism under Mary I. In 1559 Elizabeth I took the throne and, during her 44-year reign, cast the Church of England as a “middle way” between Calvinism and Catholicism, with vernacular worship and a revised Book of Common Prayer.

**The Counter-Reformation**

The Catholic Church was slow to respond systematically to the theological and publicity innovations of Luther and the other reformers. The Council of Trent, which met off and on from 1545 through 1563, articulated the Church's answer to the problems that triggered the Reformation and to the reformers themselves.

In addition to the creation of many Catholic universities, the counter-reformation used violent Inquisitions, both in Spain and in Rome, and the banning of “heretical books” to fight the threat of Protestant heresy. During this time thousands of Protestants died.

As time went on, the Catholic Church of the Counter-Reformation era grew more spiritual, more literate and more educated. New religious orders, notably the Jesuits, combined rigorous spirituality with a globally minded intellectualism, while mystics such as Teresa of Avila injected new passion into the older orders. Essentially the
Counter-Reformation allowed the Catholic Church to reform its most grievous abuses while still asserting the need for Catholic doctrine and rituals.

**The Reformation's Legacy**

Along with the religious consequences of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation came deep and lasting political changes. Northern Europe's new religious and political freedoms came at a great cost, with decades of rebellions, wars and bloody persecutions (by Catholics and Protestants). The Thirty Years' War alone may have cost Germany 40 percent of its population.

But the Reformation's positive repercussions can be seen in the intellectual and cultural flourishing it inspired on all sides of the schism—in the strengthened universities of Europe, growing literacy rates, the Lutheran church music of Johan Sebastian Bach, the baroque altarpieces of Pieter Paul Rubens and even the capitalism of Dutch Calvinist merchants.

In fact it could be said that it is impossible to understand modern history apart from the Reformation. We cannot understand the history of Europe, England or America without studying the Reformation. For example, in America there would never have been Pilgrim Fathers if there had not first been a Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation also profoundly affected the modern view of politics and law. Prior to the Reformation the Catholic Church governed politics. Before the reformation the Catholic Church, to a certain extent, controlled emperors and kings and governed the law of lands.

In the realm of science, it has been argued that there would not have been modern science were it not for the Reformation. All scientific investigation and endeavor prior to that had been controlled by the Catholic Church.

Finally, the Reformation laid down once and for all the right and obligation of the individual conscience, and the right to follow the dictates of that individual conscience. This concept no doubt contributed to the ideas of personal liberties and individual rights that were later developed during the Enlightenment.

**This article has been compiled from the following articles:**
