

## F. The Reformation and Religious Wars (1517-1648): The Failure of Religious Unity

1. Even though Europe had evolved into separate kingdoms, Catholic Christianity was a religion they all had in common. This made them into a community called “Christendom.”
2. To celebrate the success of the Catholic Church, Pope Leo X wished to construct a huge church in Rome, called St. Peter's, that would serve as the symbol of the greatness of Christendom under Catholic leadership.
3. In order to pay for this project, Leo authorized the sale of special “indulgences” to Christians throughout Europe. (Indulgences were special privileges you could earn by buying them, including a way you could pay to help someone you loved get to heaven.)
5. A monk named Martin Luther, who had dedicated his life to earning his way into heaven by being as perfectly religious as he could, was furious when he heard of the sale of indulgences. To Luther, it wasn't right to pretend you could be a good Christian by giving the Church money.
6. Luther wrote down his objections to the sale of indulgences in an essay that became known as the “Ninety-Five Theses”. (He had ninety-five separate objections!) He posted these objections to the Church door in Wittenberg to make them public on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517.
7. When the pope recruited the king of Catholic Spain and newly chosen “Holy Roman Emperor,” Charles V, to arrest Luther and stop him from teaching others his beliefs, known as “Lutheranism,” he found that Luther was protected by German aristocrats, and then he ran into other problems.
8. Starting in 1534, the pope found that his religious authority over England was rejected by King Henry VIII. The pope had refused to grant Henry, whose marriage to Catherine of Aragon had failed to produce an heir, an annulment of his marriage. Henry then created a law called the “Act of Supremacy” that made him the leader of the Church of England. This made another kind of Christianity, known as “Anglicanism.”
9. To make matters worse for the pope, in 1536, John Calvin, a one-time Lutheran from France, moved to Switzerland, where he published a book called the “*Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” which announced his own version of Christianity: “Calvinism.”
10. Calvinism was widely accepted in Switzerland and the Netherlands, which was also technically part of the Holy Roman Empire, but where the people were very independent.
11. When the Netherlands declared its independence from the Holy Roman Empire in 1567, Spain invaded Netherlands and there was the *Eighty Years' War* (1568-1648). At the same time, Spain assembled a massive fleet known as the “Spanish Armada” for the invasion of England. When the Spanish Armada was defeated in 1588, both England and Netherlands began to build their own fleets to compete with Spain and to create colonial and trading empires in America and Asia.
12. Although Spain continued the fight, Sweden and Denmark were also converted to Lutheranism and lent their armies to support the cause of the Lutherans in Germany. When their combined efforts still weren't quite enough, something remarkable happened: France, which had remained Catholic, send money to support of the Lutherans against the Catholic Holy Roman Empire. The explanation for this is that France's king and religious leaders, including the famous Cardinal Richelieu, had become true nationalists. They viewed the Holy Roman Empire (which combined Spain and so many parts of Germany and Italy) as a threat to France's independence, and they decided that nationalism was a more important reason for deciding who to help in the wars of religion than which form of Christianity either side believed in.
13. With Spain finally exhausted, the nations involved in the various wars all sent ambassadors to



By the “Act of Supremacy” passed by the English parliament in 1534, king Henry VIII became the head of the *Church of England*.

a peace conference in 1648 where they redrew the map of Europe, in both a political and religious sense.

- a) Importantly, the Peace of Westphalia saw the official recognition by the rulers of Europe of two new countries: Netherlands and Switzerland. (Both were mainly Calvinist.)
- b) Within the Holy Roman Empire itself, the Peace of Westphalia applied the idea of “*cuius regio, eius religio*” (the ruler chooses the religion) to allow for Lutheranism and Calvinism as well as Catholicism. (England was not yet accepted, but would be soon.)
- c) Perhaps the most dramatic fact concerning the peace was that the pope had no role in it. He was deeply disturbed by it and denounced it, however his disapproval was basically ignored. Though the people of Europe remained Christian, even the Catholic countries no longer accepted the idea that the pope could command their rulers in matters not restricted to religion. A new life was beginning where a single accepted form of Christianity could no longer be a way to unify Europe.