

## 4.2D Reformation

As you discovered in the Enquiry on pages 44–51, the Church mattered a lot in the Middle Ages. The Church had great power over people's lives. It gave people hope of reaching Heaven when they died. It also provided practical help to people in their daily lives.

In the Early Modern period, Christianity was just as important to people as it had been in the Middle Ages. However, in the sixteenth century, an enormous change took place. We call this the Reformation. Christians in Europe split into two groups – **Catholics** and **Protestants**. This had huge consequences for people's lives.

### Martin Luther

People had been criticising the Church throughout the Middle Ages. Heretics in different parts of Europe had claimed that the Church did not follow the true teachings of Christianity. The Church had punished heretics harshly. Many had been burned alive for their beliefs. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Church had held together, but in the early sixteenth century, all this changed. This was mainly due to one man – Martin Luther.

Luther was a monk and a professor at the University of Wittenberg in Saxony. From a young age he was deeply religious. As he grew older, Luther began to fear that the Church could not help him to find God. Luther was worried about the state of the Church and had clear ideas about what people should do to reach Heaven.

Attending mass, going on pilgrimage and giving money to church do not mean that you will go to Heaven.

The only way to gain God's forgiveness and to reach Heaven is by believing in Jesus Christ. A Christian's individual faith is all that matters.

People should read the Bible for themselves in their own language.



In God's eyes, there is no difference between priests and ordinary people.

The Pope has too much wealth and power. The ruler of each country should be the head of the Church there, not the Pope.

A portrait of Martin Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1532

### Task

Use the information on these two pages to make some notes to answer the interviewer's last three questions:

- 1 What was the Reformation?
- 2 How did the Reformation happen?
- 3 What were the consequences of the Reformation?

### Reflect

- 4 Why do you think that many people in the early sixteenth century found Luther's ideas very shocking?

### The spread of Luther's ideas

In 1516, Pope Leo X needed money to finish building St Peter's Basilica in Rome. He sent a preacher called Tetzel to sell indulgences in Germany. Indulgences were pieces of paper which promised a place in Heaven to anyone who bought one. Luther was so angry that he wrote 95 arguments against indulgences. According to one account, in October 1517, Luther fastened his 'Ninety-five Theses' to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg.



A picture of Martin Luther made in 1617

Over the next few weeks, Luther's 'Ninety-five Theses' was printed in different languages. Many people across Europe read his criticisms of the Church. The Pope was furious and, in 1521, he **excommunicated** Luther. There was fear that Luther might be burned as a heretic, but the ruler of Saxony gave him protection.

Luther worked harder than ever. He translated the Bible into German so that ordinary people could read it and wrote books attacking the Church. These were translated into other languages and printed in towns across Europe. Many rulers and ordinary people, particularly in northern Europe, were attracted to Luther's ideas.

From the 1520s, Europe became divided between Protestant and Catholic countries. People could be punished, and even put to death, for practising their beliefs. Over the next two centuries, the split in Christianity led to terrible conflicts within countries. It also led to wars between European nations. The Reformation changed the way in which some people viewed their place in the world. Nobody could escape its consequences.

### Reflect

Picture J was made around 100 years after Martin Luther's protests against the Catholic Church.

#### 5 Find:

- Martin Luther carrying a torch and the bible
- a devil, representing the Catholic Church
- the priest selling indulgences. He is wearing a jester's hat.

How would you explain the picture to someone who knows nothing about Martin Luther and the Reformation?

### Final task

- 6 Work with a partner. One of you should be the interviewer who asks the questions. The other should be the expert historian. Take it in turns to ask questions and give answers for the podcast 'What changed, 1450–1550?'