

# REFORMATION

## Meaning:

The Reformation in the conventional sense implies the schism or break within the Roman Catholic Church that functional under the Pope in Europe for centuries and the creation of separate Protestant Christianity. This break up of Unity of Christendom was only one part of Reformation/. It led to the creation of several radical and moderate fold within Christianity such as Lutherans, Calvinist, puritans, Anabaptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians. There were also the efforts of some Catholics to reform their church through counter-reformation. More significant were the profound changes in the religious sensibilities and attitudes of people towards social and economic issues. The Reformation embraced a number of areas -reform of both the morals and structures of a number of churches and society, reinterpretation of Christian spirituality and the reform its doctrine. The popularity of Reform movement cannot be properly understood purely in religious light.

The process of reformation is known in history as the 'Reformation Movement'. According to Warner and Martia, "The Reformation was a moral revolt against the Papal grossness and corruption. The great historian Hayes states, "In fact, in the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Christians under the force of prudence condemned the catholic church vigorously and wished to reform thoroughly. The religious movement which occurred in the wake of this reformative drive and the new religious sects formed out of disruptive Christianity-all these events collectively constitute the reformative movement. On the 'whole, the word reformation denotes two significant phases of the post -Renaissance period in the history of Europe. The first phase relates to the Protestant revolution which caused split in the Christianity and the other entails the formation of separate national churches by various countries after breaking their affiliation with the Roman Catholic church.

## Cause of Reformation:

The rise of national dynasties and the existence of an influential business as well as of individualism and freedom of thought which were off shoots of humanism, prepared a background for Reformation. In addition to it, life style of the bishops and the clergy had become vicious and the doctrine of Christianity were full of contradictions. there were main following causes for Reformation.

### (a) Scientific Progress:

The scientific Greek ideas regarding the world and God emerged from renaissance in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and obliterated the doctrine of the church. For example, Ptolemy held that the earth is the center of Solar system. The belief was so inveterate that Bruno was burnt alive when he disapproved of Ptolemy's theory. At the same time the learned thinkers postulated, contrary to the religious belief, that man can become the maker of his own destiny. Due to the invention of mariner-compass the Europeans came in contact with different non-Christian cultures. consequently, religious ostentation was exposed.

### (b) Diffusion of Education:

Before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, only religious education was imparted in European education-centers. But as a result of Renaissance, the subjects of humanities were studied in Italy and many other parts of Europe. The diffusion of non-religious education

enabled people to see through the evils of Christianity. The introduction of printing press contributed immensely to the diffusion of non-religious education. In a short period of 50 years, about million books were published. the circulation of books disseminated special knowledge and new thoughts.

In several European states like Germany, France and England new universities were founded which at later stage became centers of activities of Leaders of Reformation.

**(c) Economic Changes:**

The economy of medieval Europe was based on agriculture. The farmers did not enjoy any freedom under feudal system because they depended upon the wish of the feudal lords. Artisans, Sculptors and Masons did not have any individual freedom because like agriculture, the industry was too tied in class-system. But in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of big and powerful states the artisans got freedom. At the same time a special class emerged which was willing to invest its capital to employ free farmers and labour on its own terms. This system increased production and increased production paved the way for the commercial progress. With the growth of business and industry, a rich class came into existence. The rich class wished to lead a life of luxuries on the strength of wealth although it was against the conventions of Christianity. Besides, Christianity prohibited charging interest on money and earning unusual profit. Because of these reasons, the rich class encouraged reformation. When the King struggled against the Pope's intervention in secular matters, he was supported by business class. This class set its eyes on the immense wealth and prosperity.

**(d) Demerits of Church:**

The total set up of church had degenerated since the medieval period. Since the advent of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the church had become powerful instrument of control and exploitation. It had turned into a vast, systematized institution, had forsaken its real aim and had acquired a great power by means of putting restraint on every field of administration and society.

Irrespective of his status, every person was put under the rule of the church. Everyone was required to confess his sins to a priest once a year and had to accept punishment for them. A non-conformist was expelled from religion. It was maintained that a person expelled from religion was destined for hell and was excommunicated. After his death he could not be buried to traditional rites.

A significant characteristic of the Roman Catholic church was the sacramental system. It was deemed to be the source of God's Grace for people. In other words, it was essential to follow the sacraments in order to gain God's grace. Salvation without adherence to the sacraments could not be imagined. According to the sacramental system, priests could work a miracle by God's grace and literature of sinner for their sins.

The corruption that pervaded the Church was directly connected with economic exploitation. Everyone had to pay one tenth of his income to the church. Taxes were increased in order to meet the increasing expenses of the church. One had to make an offering to the church in addition to the payment of fixed taxes. The practice of tax and gift became a burden on the people. The exploitation committed by the church

annoyed both King and rich. Owing to the spirit of nationalism which was mounting up in various regions, the ruling section considered the exaction of money by the church the theft of their own share.

(e) **Political Cause:**

Pope's political influence and a keen desire among kings for freedom from it are also responsible for reformation. In the medieval period the Pope was invested with extensive political rights. For example, he intervened in the internal as well as external affairs of the states affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, he had the rights to expel the King from religion; he had the right to neglect, prelates and order the public to revolt against the state, But the condition had changed in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Kings established their autocracy by way of suppressing the feudal barons. Nation-states were established in certain parts of Europe. All this consolidated the position of Kings. In these circumstances, it was natural for the Kings to challenge the intervention of the Pope. Every ruler wanted to establish law courts and levy taxes in accordance with the national norms. These things led to the reformation movement.

(f) **Immediate Cause:**

owing to its excessive expensive the church started exacting money through legal and illegal, proper and improper means. The immediate cause of Reformation was an illegal act of the Pope's authorization of priest Tetzel who sold "Letter of Absolution" or "Letters of Indulgence" in Germany. In 1517 when Johann Tetzel- a German Dominican monk and Inquisitor as well as Pope's agent sold the 'Letters of Indulgence' openly in Wittenberg, Martin Luther opposed him vehemently on the strength of his infamous '95' thesis and raised a voice of revolt against the Pope. Luther stressed the fact the Salvation cannot be purchased for money. God's immense grace is essential for redemption from sins. He promulgated the new doctrine of "Absolution through Faith". He felt that if a person felt remorse for his wrong doings and had a deep faith in God, he would be absolved without 'Letters of Indulgence'

**Conclusion:**

The Reformation movement that was started by Luther did not only established new sects in Christendom like Lutheranism, Calvinism and Anglicism etc. but also inculcated wholesome reforms in the religious life of Europe especially the Roman Catholic Church that led to Counter Reformation or Catholic Reformation. It Purged People from the ill domination of corrupt religious functionaries and it was first time in the history of Catholic Religion that a successful revolution occurred that not only changed that religious outlook of Europe but also the whole socio-religious setup.