

The REFORMATION PERIOD...1500--1700 (approximate) (overall chart)

Historical Conditions

This is a period of great change and it is marked by the widespread use of printing, the end of feudalism, the continuation of the Renaissance, the entrenchment of superstition, the development of new nationalism, and a general movement against tradition. There is the development of the middle class, the commercial society and the new economic freedoms that came with this. There is the insistence on more personal liberty and the demand for wider education. It was, in most ways, a revolutionary period.

Great rivalries existed among France, Spain, England, and the Scandinavian countries. The Low countries were emerging as mercantile powers and the Mediterranean countries as centers of trade and industry. The number of universities and learning centers was multiplying and the publishing business had become vast. At the same time, the lower classes were unable to keep up with the pace and were, by most standards, in dire straits. The church had become worldly minded to a high degree...the bishoprics being sold to the highest bidder and the better popes being men of building interest. Attempts were made to spread the faith by armies, to maintain it by armies and the general circumstances were considerably upset and difficult.

Conflicts

The church politic faced an ongoing run-in with the heretics and the new preachers of freedom. What made Wyclif, Hus, Savonarola, et al, heretics was not their biblical doctrines but their polity ideas. The condemnation of these men was largely achieved on the basis of how they reacted to the ecclesiastical authority, not how they compared with the teachings of the Fathers of the church.

There were continuing conflicts with the Moors and the Turks and political rivalries within nations. The city-states of Italy vied with one another for prominence and their own disunion contributed much to the difficulties of the age.

The philosophic conflict had left the problem of reality and now occupied itself with man and the humanistic tendencies that grew with the Renaissance.