

The Protestant Reformation

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers the Protestant Reformation. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, briefly explain what the Protestant Reformation was, briefly explain the five points of Calvinism, and identify examples of artwork from this period. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

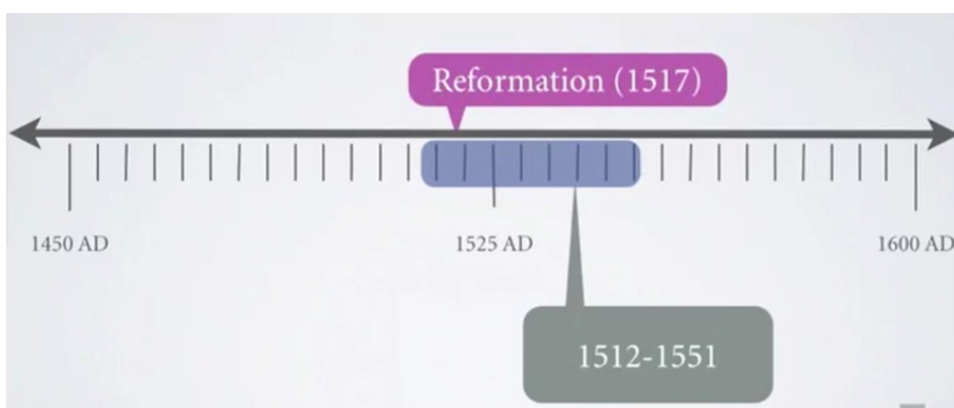


BIG IDEA

The Protestant Reformation was a major movement within Christianity that resulted in a schism within the Catholic Church based on ideological differences.

1. Period and Location: The Protestant Reformation

The events and artwork that you will be learning about today spans from 1512 to 1551. Note the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 as a reference point. Geographically, this lesson focuses on Wittenberge, Germany.



2. The Protestant Reformation: A Brief History

Although 1517 traditionally marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, it was an event many years in the making. Martin Luther was a very devout Augustinian monk, but the Catholic Church's sale of indulgences—which are essentially accumulated merit—finally compelled him to take action. Martin Luther's belief was

that the justification of faith alone was enough to warrant God's forgiveness of sins. The selling of indulgences was looked at by Luther as a way for the Catholic Church to essentially profit from the salvation of its people.

He wrote a response to the Church's action in a writing called *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, more commonly known as *The 95 Theses*, and nailed it, supposedly, to the door of the local All Saints' Church. This action is widely considered to be the impetus for the Protestant Reformation.

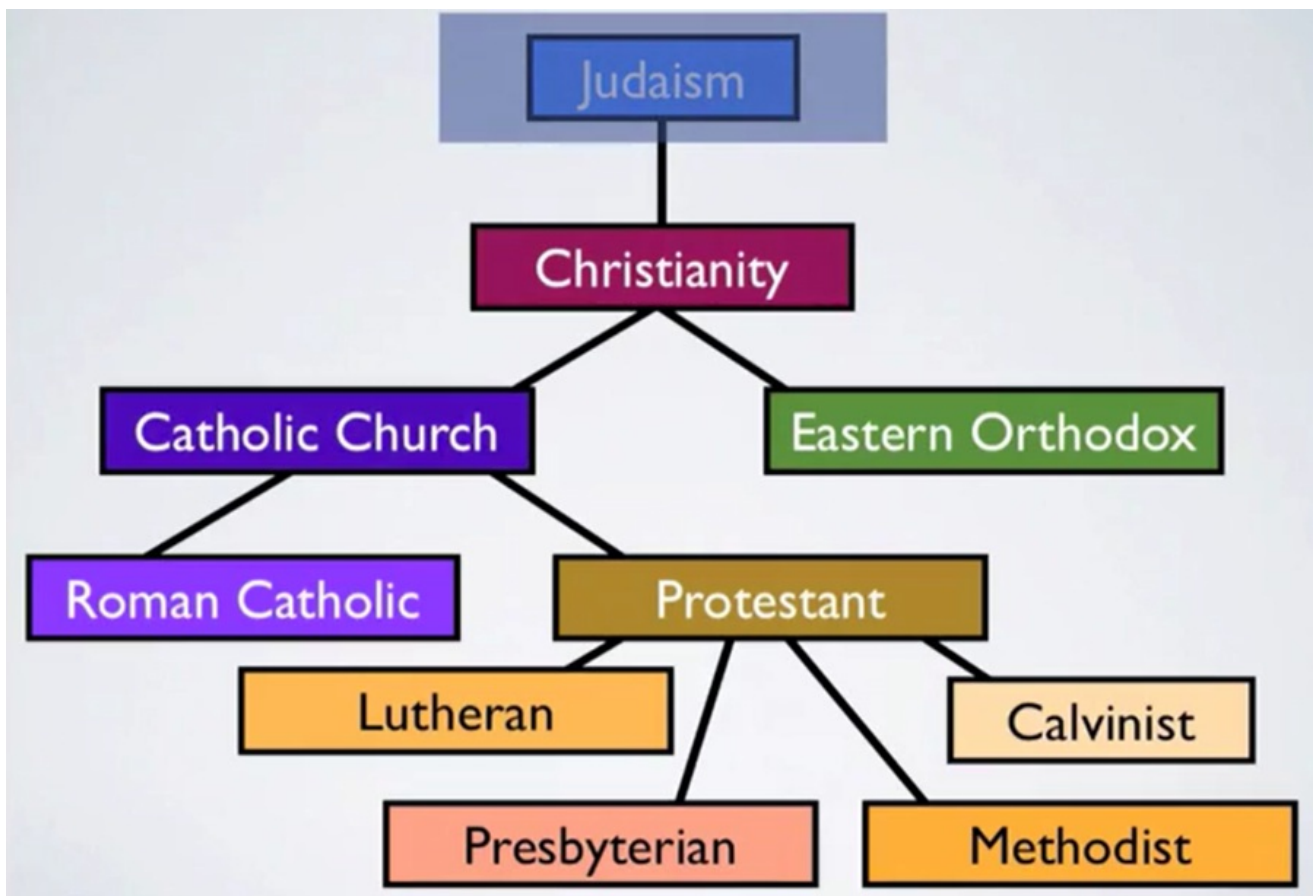


Martin Luther

3. Christianity: A Brief History

This movement was monumental and resulted in the eventual schism of the Western Catholic Church into the Catholic, or traditional, Church—which eventually came to be called the Roman Catholic Church—and the reformed, or Protestant Church.

If you look at the “family tree” of Christianity, below, it begins with Judaism and then moves into Christianity after Christ. Christianity was essentially an offshoot of Judaism. There occurred what is called the Great Schism, which was the church essentially breaking into two groups: the Western or Catholic or Latin, Church, based in Rome, and the Eastern Orthodox Church.



After Martin Luther and the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church was again essentially broken into two groups: Roman Catholic and Protestant. The Protestant sect was further broken into other areas as they emerged, based on different variations of the basic tenets of the reformed church: Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, the Methodist Church, and the Calvinist Church—all variants of Protestantism.

Now, while this isn't the definitive family tree of Christianity, it at least gives you a good idea of how the different religions, or the different churches, play against each other.

4. Artists of the Protestant Reformation

4a. Matthias Grünewald

Matthias Grünewald, an artist known for painting and drawing, originated from the **Holy Roman Empire**, or what is now modern-day Germany. Here is his self-portrait:

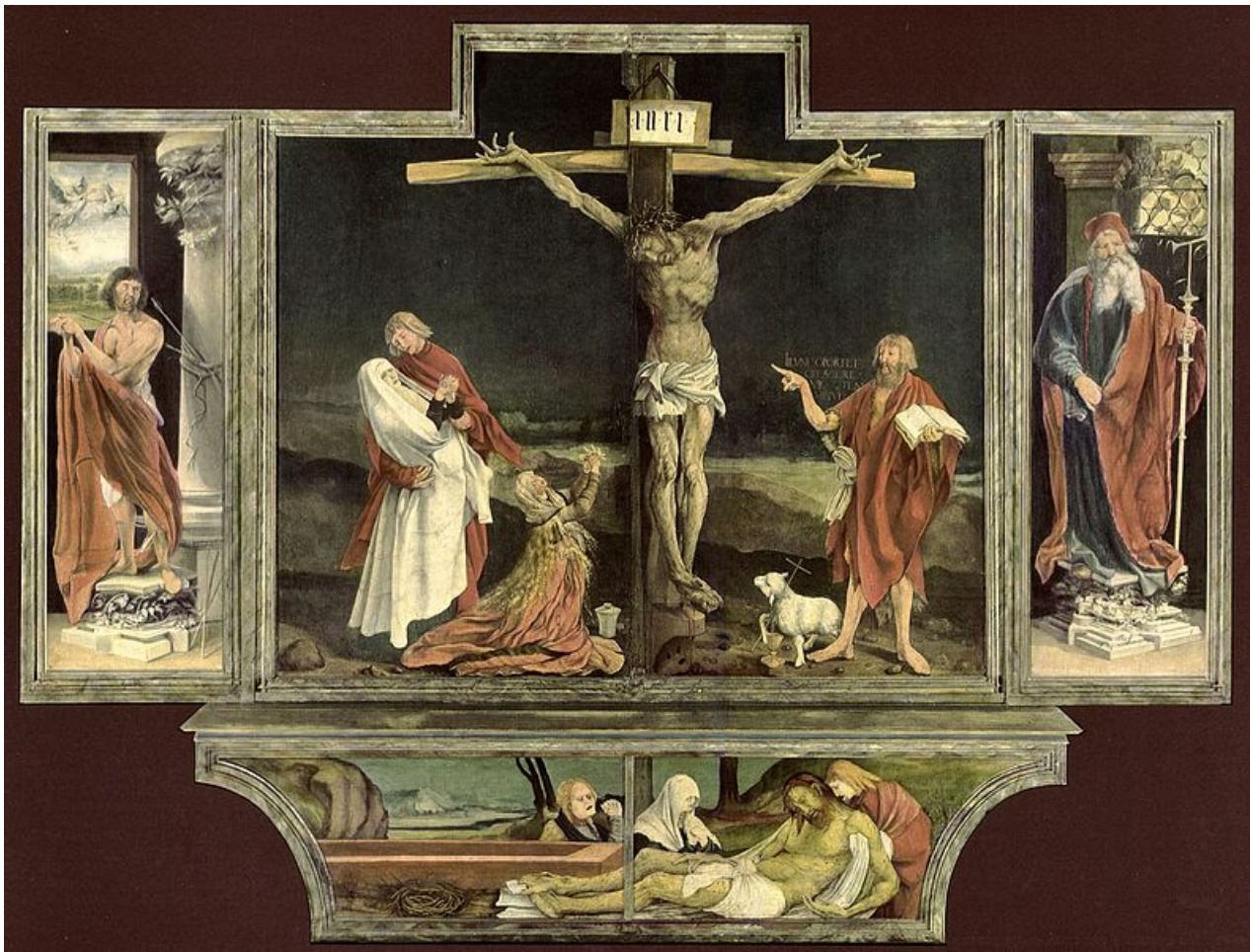


Self-portrait by Matthias Grünewald

1512-1514

Chalk on paper

One of his most well-known works of art—of those that survive—is the “Isenheim Altarpiece.” He collaborated with another artist who completed the carvings, which are not shown. The image below is of the altarpiece closed.



Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald

1510-1515

Oil on wood panel

The subject matter is that of the crucifixion, in which an emaciated and rather ghastly figure of Christ is shown having already expired. He's rendered in grisly detail and appears to have been dead for some time. The colors of the body suggest that the process of decay has probably already begun, and his fingers are rigid, which is an indication of rigor mortis.

His mother, the Virgin Mary, is shown in white being cradled by Saint John. Mary Magdalene is shown on her knees, and Saint John the Baptist appears to orate on the right about Jesus' prophesied rise from the dead. The predella, which is the space below the upper portion of the altarpiece, depicts the lamentation of Christ, in which his mother and friends prepare his body for entombment.



DID YOU KNOW

Altarpieces and other large works of art such as this were discouraged and sometimes forbidden in the reformed churches that emerged in the years to follow.



TERM TO KNOW

Holy Roman Empire

Consisting of mostly Germany and part of Italy but comprised of diverse ethnicities, this area was ruled by the Holy Roman Emperor from 962 to 1806. Its decline and eventual collapse coincided

with the decline of the pope and the power of the emperor.

4b. Lucas Cranach

The painter Lucas Cranach's professional name is derived from his birthplace of Kronach in modern-day Germany. Cranach, shown below in his self-portrait, was a very close friend of Martin Luther's, and his work is closely associated with the Reformation.



Self-portrait by Lucas Cranach

1550

Oil on panel

His painting of the “Allegory of Law and Grace” was completed in 1530, well after the initial onset of the Protestant Reformation in 1517. It is the first example of artwork that’s post-Reformation, with the exception of the piece shown below, the portrait of Martin Luther that was painted by Cranach.



Portrait of Martin Luther by Lucas Cranach

1529

Oil on wood panel

The “Allegory of Law and Grace,” shown below, is a pictorial representation of the different ideologies between the churches regarding salvation.



Allegory of Law and Grace by Lucas Cranach

1530

Oil on beech wood panel

On the left is the traditional view based on the Old Testament law of being judged based on good works. It depicts a person who apparently attempted to live a good life being judged and damned by Christ—shown on a cloud in the sky—and subsequently chased by a demon skeleton into what you can assume to be the fiery chasm of hell. On the right is the Protestant view of an individual being saved by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, or by the grace of God.



It’s a work of art that would not have been forbidden or discouraged by the Protestant Reformation. In fact, quite the opposite. It would have been viewed as a visual ideological statement comparing Protestantism with Catholicism, and a valuable tool for the conversion of large numbers of people.

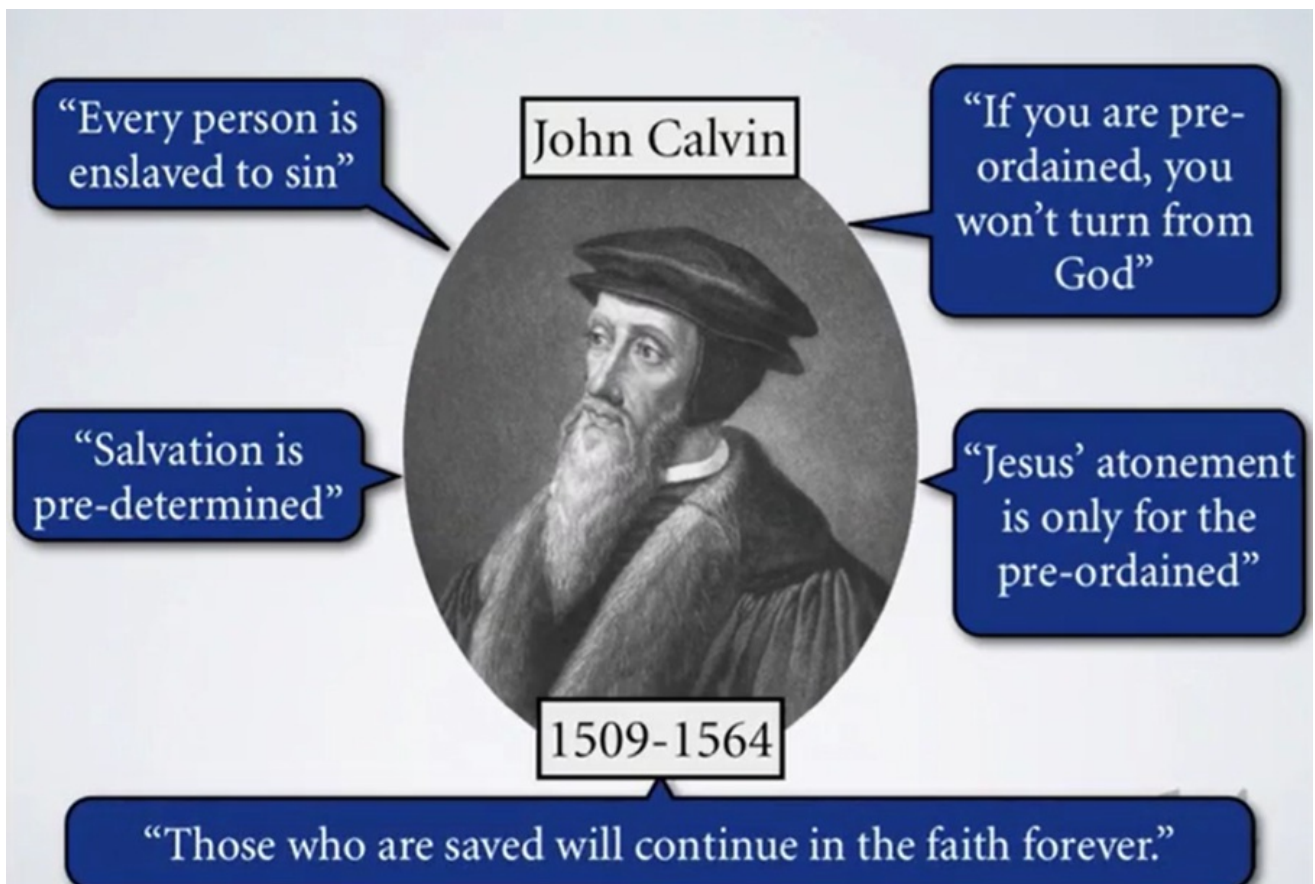
5. Calvinism

Calvinism was an offshoot of the church of the Protestant Reformation, but like the Reformation, it was the eventuality of the work from previous reformists, not just the work of one man. However, John Calvin helped in establishing what is referred to as the “five points of Calvinism,” which takes a different, and perhaps more exclusive, approach to the reformist view of eternal salvation.

To paraphrase the five points:

- *One:* Every person is enslaved to sin.
- *Two:* Salvation is predetermined (one of the most controversial points).

- *Three:* Jesus' atonement is only for the pre-ordained.
- *Four:* If you are pre-ordained, you won't turn from God.
- *Five:* Those who are saved will continue in the faith forever.



5a. Pieter Aertsen

Pieter Aertsen was a painter originally from Amsterdam. He grew up and worked at a time in which the Reformation was taking form. One of his paintings is shown below, though it is not an image of the artist himself.



The Egg Dance by Pieter Aertsen

1557

Oil on panel

Calvinism is believed to have had a strong influence on the Aertsen painting called the “Butcher's Stall,” or more familiarly, the “Meat Still Life.” The painting appears to be a typical genre painting from a **Northern Renaissance** painter. However, religious imagery and symbolism can be seen if you look carefully.



Butcher's Stall (also known as Meat Still Life) by Pieter Aertsen

1551

Oil on panel

Aertsen displays a wealth of meat and food items in the foreground, but if you look carefully you can see, in

the very back, Joseph on foot leading a donkey carrying Mary, who is shown donating to the poor. In the foreground, fish, pretzels, and wine—all associated in their own way with religious symbolism—are juxtaposed with oysters, meats, and other foods considered gluttonous or lustful.



HINT

This is similar, perhaps, to the message conveyed in Quentin Massys' painting of the money changer, which was a reminder of the importance of piety in a world filled with sin.



TERM TO KNOW

Northern Renaissance

An age of artistic and cultural discovery and Christian humanism that took place in Germany, the Netherlands, and France.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about the **Protestant Reformation**. You learned how to identify and define today's key terms, and how to explain the **brief history of the Protestant Reformation**. You also learned a **brief history of Christianity**. You learned how to identify examples of artwork from this period by exploring works by **artists of the Reformation**, such as **Matthias Grunewald** and **Lucas Cranach**. Lastly, you learned how to briefly explain the five points of **Calvinism**, and explored the Calvinism-inspired work of artist **Pieter Aertsen**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



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