

Religious Conflicts in the 16th and 17th Centuries

It is evident that war and conflict were fundamental to European history. Europe has dealt with many political conflicts, such as strong nations trying to overcome another nations, powerful monarchs who wrongly imposed feudalism on its peasants, and wars over who will be the next monarch. But conflicts have arisen through religious means as well. The Renaissance sparked many new ideas about society and religion that had not been thought of yet, such as the idea of Humanism. Humanism is the idea that emphasis should be placed on human needs, which conflicted with the devoted religious practices of the Catholic church. During the Age of Exploration, most of the European countries raced to conquer new lands, which started conflicts with other countries about new discoveries. The new ideas caused Europe to become more global, meaning Europeans were discovering new cultures and beliefs, including religion. Prior to the new conflicts that would arise in the 16th and 17th century, Europeans started to be exposed to other cultures, which was one of the reasons why the Protestant Reformation occurred.

All these eras led to some of the most important religious conflicts in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. There are three important religious conflicts that changed European history forever: the Revolts in the Netherlands, French Religious Wars, and the Thirty Years' War. These conflicts are have distinct causes, conflicts, and

results. The religious conflicts that Europe experienced throughout the 16th and 17th centuries were centered around religious differences due to the Reformation and the different political ideals of certain countries.

One such religious conflict during the Reformation is what is known as the Revolts in the Netherlands. At first glance, this may appear to have been a political conflict as it was a Dutch rebellion against the Spanish Monarch, Phillip II, who was trying to impose his will on the Netherlands. But upon further inspection, Phillip II was ultimately trying to convert all of Dutch to Catholicism. Phillip II was the son of Charles V, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and member of the Habsburg family line, an extremely Catholic family. Phillip II's plan to convert the Northern Dutch people to Catholicism faced barriers and caused these revolts because many of the Northern Dutch people were either Lutheran, Anabaptist, or Calvinism, all Protestant religions. At the time, Spain was in control of the Netherlands and many of the Northern Dutch wanted religious independence from Catholic Spain. The Northern Dutch revolted in a quest for religious independence. All of the major causes of the revolts in the Netherlands were due to religion and the Dutch desire for religious independence.

During the Netherlands 80 year conquest to gain religious independence from Spain, there were many conflicts that came about. It is important to state that without the help of England, the Netherlands might have never gained independence. During the Dutch revolts, Queen Elizabeth I of England not only sent troops to fight against the Spanish army, but funded many of the Dutch armies. Phillip II was enraged by the fact that England was helping the Dutch and getting involved with the religious conflicts

between the Northern Dutch and himself, causing further conflict. England was primarily Protestant and Phillip II sent four Spanish Armadas to reimpose Catholicism and conquer England. However, every single Spanish Armada was unsuccessful.

The result of the Revolts in the Netherlands not only brought Dutch religious independence from Spain, but also demonstrated England's military power, while it damaged the Spanish monarchy's power. It can be said that England's defeat of the Spanish Armadas caused the end of the Spanish Golden Age. Another major result of the Dutch revolts was the decline of the Habsburg's power in Europe. Following the Dutch Revolts, the Habsburg ruler was primarily turned into a political "puppet" figure with little power and say. This dramatically changed the way that other monarchs saw the Habsburg rulers and eventually was one reason why the Holy Roman Empire collapsed. The Revolts of the Netherlands, starting as a religious conflict, had significant outcomes for Europe. Though a major consequence was one of religious freedom for the Netherlands, the Revolts helped to change political power throughout Europe. It is clear that religious conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries impacted Europe's history.

Another major religious conflict in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries was the French Religious Wars. The French Religious Wars was caused by two major religious conflicts: the Huguenots versus the Catholics and a discrepancy over the heir to the French monarchy. The Huguenots were French Protestants who primarily practiced Calvinism, which had not been officially accepted by many countries throughout Europe, including France. Much of France practiced Catholicism. The other major cause for the French Religious Wars was a discrepancy over who would be the next French monarch.

Again, though this conflict may first appear to be a political struggle, it was in fact one with religious origins. This was a three-way war that was fought between Henry III, who was technically the monarch's heir, Henry IV of Bourbon, who was supported by the Huguenots, and Henry of Lorraine, who was supported by the Catholic church.

One of the major conflicts during the French Religious Wars was the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The massacre happened the night before the wedding of Henry of Navarre, who was Protestant, and Marguerite of Valois, who was Catholic. The wedding was a big affair and many important guests, who were both Protestant and Catholic, gathered in Paris to attend the wedding. Catherin de Medeci, a French Catholic leader at the time, decided to take advantage of the opportunity of having a mass of Protestants in one city. She ordered Catholics in Paris to massacre Protestants. The St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the killing of thousands of Protestants, led to the French Civil War, a conflict over the French throne, but one with religious overtones, in which Henry IV, won.

The French Civil War and the War of the Three Henrys, also known as the French Religious Wars, ultimately ended with Henry IV of Bourbon winning the throne due to significant financial aid from his Protestant supporter, Queen Elizabeth I of England. The results of the French Religious Wars resulted in the gain of a Protestant French Monarch, but also resulted in many Protestants being killed during the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Also, interestingly enough, after four years on the throne, Henry IV converted to Catholicism to gain the support of the Catholics in Paris. However, his conversion to Catholicism did not result in a tyrannical Catholic rule and

Henry IV still supported the Edict of Nantes, which gave French Huguenots religious freedom in certain towns. The results of the French Religious Wars demonstrates how impactful religious conflicts could be in Europe, leading to the cause of thousands of deaths, disputing over rule, and even creating alliances between nations.

Perhaps the most important religious conflict of the Reformation within the 16th and 17th centuries is The Thirty Years' War. It was fought, once again, as a religious conflict between many European countries and the powerful Holy Roman Empire. The main cause for the Thirty Years' War was the failure of the treaty, the Peace of Augsburg. The Peace of Augsburg was, in fact, supposed to end the conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Princes within the Holy Roman Empire, as it would allow the Princes to choose what religion to practice within their domain. At first, the treaty held, but after a while, the Peace of Augsburg failed because ambitious Holy Roman Princes wanted more power and religious say than the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The Thirty Years' War was, like the other conflicts mentioned, a case of a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics.

The Thirty Years' War's conflicts can be divided into four phases: Bohemian Phase, Danish Phase, Swedish Phase, and French Phase. During the first phase, the Bohemian Phase, Catholic Ferdinand II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, revoked the Letter of Majesty, a reluctantly-signed document by Rudolph II, that said it was acceptable for the people of Bohemia to be either Protestant or Catholic, and declared everyone Catholic. Consequently, the Protestants were angry and decided to battle Ferdinand II at the Battle of White Mountain. However, Ferdinand II won. The second

phase of the Thirty Years' War was the Danish Phase in which another Catholic victory was led by Albrecht von Wallenstein, a military leader from Bohemia. Many Protestant lands were taken in this conflict and the Edict of Restitution was put into place, commanding all Protestants to convert to Catholicism. The third phase is called the Swedish Phase. This phase is significant to the Thirty Years' War conflict as this is when the tides of the war changed. Adolphus, King of Sweden and a Protestant, led an army that pushed the Holy Roman Empire forces back to Bohemia, causing the Holy Roman Empire to revoke the Edict of Restitution. Many Protestant land that was lost during the Danish Phase was then gained back. The French Phase was the last phase of the 30 Years' War. Although France was a Catholic nation, Cardinal Richelieu of France saw the chance to weaken the Habsburg's power and the Holy Roman Empire, so France fought alongside the Protestants. Technically, the Protestants won the fourth phase, which ended the war.

By and by, the results of the Thirty Years' War were significant and led to much of the religious changes that Europe would undergo for years to come. The major result of the Thirty Years' War was the Treaty of Westphalia, which formally declared the Dutch Republic's religious and political independence from Spain, accepted Calvinism as an official religion, and denied the Holy Roman Empire control over the Princes. Possibly the most remarkable result of this religious conflict was the weakening of the Holy Roman Empire and its political power in Europe. As a whole, the result of the Thirty Years' War is accountable for the end of the Holy Roman Empire.

To conclude, the religious conflicts in the 16th and 17th century impacted European politics, cultures, and ultimately, its history in ways that had never been seen before. The religious conflicts of the Reformation created major events such as the Revolts in the Netherlands, French Religious Wars, and the Thirty Years' War, which all impacted European society. As Europe saw changes during both the Renaissance and the Age of Exploration, so, too, the Reformation and its religious conflicts helped to develop Europe into what we know today.