

Age of Reformation

AP European History

Contextualizing 16th- and 17th-Century Challenges

Unit 2 covers the **Reformation and the wars of religion**, and the CED frames the whole period around one claim: **religious pluralism challenged the concept of a unified Europe**.

Two other threads run alongside it and are examined together with religion - the reshaping of daily life by **commercial and agricultural capitalism**, and the **struggle for sovereignty** producing varying degrees of political centralisation. The unit's characteristic question asks how religious change and political change acted on each other, so keeping them in separate mental boxes is the main way students lose marks here.

Luther and the Protestant Reformation

Reformers **Martin Luther** 马丁·路德 and **John Calvin** 加尔文 criticised Catholic abuses and established **new interpretations of Christian doctrine** and practice. The CED's emphasis is on *interpretation*: what changed was not only conduct but the account of how salvation works and where religious authority lies.

A second, more social claim is examinable and often forgotten: some Protestant groups **sanctioned the notion that the accumulation of wealth was a sign of God's favour** and a reward for hard work. That is the link between the Reformation and the commercial developments of Unit 1, and it is worth having ready for economic questions.

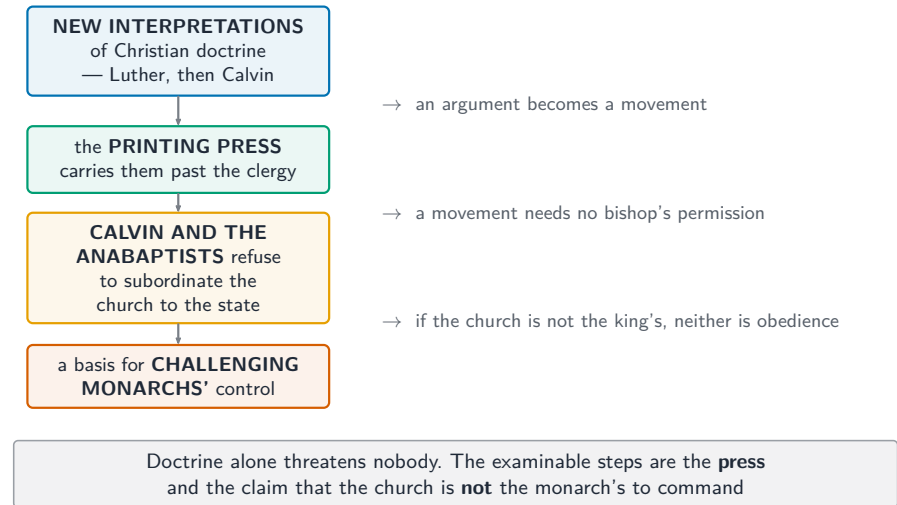
Protestant Reform Continues

Three developments carry the Reformation past its first generation:

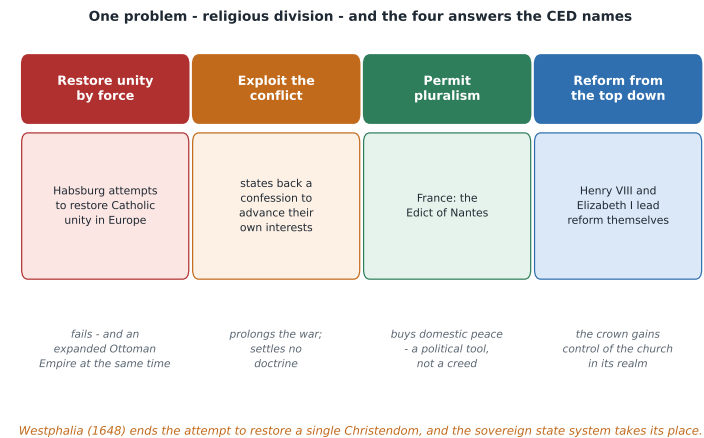
- Protestant reformers **used the printing press** 印刷机 to disseminate their ideas, which spurred reform and helped it become permanent. Printing again functions as the amplifier - it is why this movement did not end as earlier ones had.
- Some Protestants, including **Calvin and the Anabaptists** 再洗礼派, **refused to recognise the subordination of the church to the secular state**.
- Religious conflicts **became a basis for challenging monarchs' control** of religious institutions.

The last two are political claims dressed in religious language, and the CED treats

them that way. Once religious authority is contestable, so is the authority of whoever claims to control it.



Wars of Religion



Only one of these ends the conflict, and it is not the one most rulers tried first

The CED gives four state responses to religious division, and a strong answer treats them as a set:

- **Restore unity by force** - Habsburg rulers attempted to restore **Catholic unity** across Europe and failed, while simultaneously confronting an **expanded Ottoman Empire** 奥斯曼帝国.
- **Exploit the conflict** - states used religious disputes to **promote political and economic interests** rather than to settle doctrine.
- **Permit pluralism** - a few states, such as France with the **Edict of Nantes** 南特敕令, allowed religious pluralism **in order to maintain domestic peace**.
- **Reform from the top down** - monarchs, including **Henry VIII** and **Elizabeth I**, initiated religious reform themselves to strengthen control over the church within their realm.

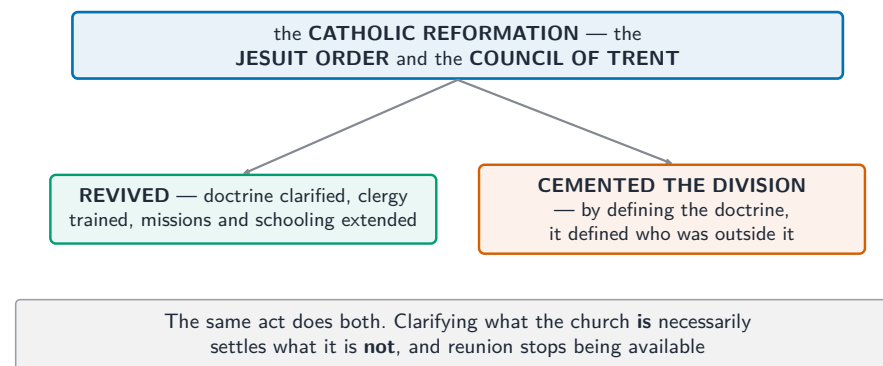
Religious reform also **exacerbated conflicts between monarchy and nobility**, as in the French wars of religion - religion supplied the language, and existing political rivalry supplied the force.

The settlement matters as much as the wars: the **Peace of Westphalia (1648)** 威斯特伐利亚和约 marked the effective end of the medieval ideal of **universal Christendom** 普世基督教世界 and accelerated the decline of the Holy Roman Empire. That is the hinge on which Unit 3 opens.

The Catholic Reformation

The **Catholic Reformation** 天主教改革, exemplified by the **Jesuit Order** 耶稣会 and the **Council of Trent** 特伦特会议, **revived the church but cemented the division** within Christianity.

Both halves of that sentence are the answer to a continuity-and-change question. The Church renewed its institutions, doctrine, education, and missionary reach - and in defining its doctrine precisely, it made reunion impossible. Revival and permanent division were the same act.

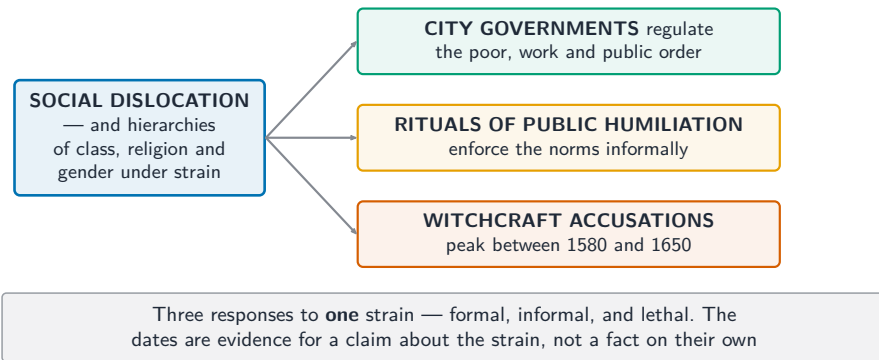


16th-Century Society and Politics

This is the unit's social-history topic, and it is dense with examinable content that essays rarely use:

- **Established hierarchies of class, religion, and gender** continued to define social status in both rural and urban settings.
- Rural and urban **households worked as units**, with men and women engaged in **separate but complementary tasks** 分工互补.
- The Renaissance and Reformation **raised debates about female education** and women's roles in family, church, and society.
- **Social dislocation** 社会失序, together with the shifting authority of religious institutions, left **city governments** to address the problems it created.
- **Leisure** remained organised by the religious calendar and the agricultural cycle, and remained communal.
- Local and church authorities enforced communal norms through **rituals of public humiliation** 公开羞辱.
- Reflecting folk belief and social and economic upheaval, **accusations of witchcraft peaked between 1580 and 1650**.

The witchcraft peak is worth holding precisely because of its dates: it coincides with the period of maximum religious conflict and economic strain, which is what makes it usable as evidence rather than as an anecdote.



Art of the 16th Century: Mannerism and Baroque

Mannerist and Baroque 手法主义与巴洛克 artists employed **distortion, drama, and illusion** 变形、戏剧性与幻觉. Monarchies, city-states, and the church commissioned these works.

The examinable point is the same as in Unit 1, one step further: art was **commissioned to persuade**. Baroque drama in a Catholic church and Baroque grandeur at a royal court are doing the same work in different directions - asserting the authority of the patron in an age when authority was contested.

Causation in the Age of Reformation

The unit's reasoning skill is **causation**.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). AP European History short-answer questions here ask, for example, to “*Explain one way in which political developments in the sixteenth century were influenced by religious change.*” A full-mark answer names both sides of the influence: “*Religious reform gave the nobility a language and a justification for resisting royal authority, as in the French wars of religion, where noble families used confessional allegiance to organise opposition to the crown. The monarchy's response - eventually the Edict of Nantes - was therefore a political settlement of a religious dispute, granting toleration in order to restore royal control.*” Notice that the answer moves in both directions, because the CED's own framing does.

Exam tips

- Never separate **religion and politics** in this unit. Nearly every question tests the interaction.
- The four state responses - **force, exploitation, toleration, top-down reform** - make an excellent answer skeleton for any wars-of-religion question.
- **Westphalia** is the hinge: the end of universal Christendom, the start of the sovereign state system.
- The Catholic Reformation **revived and divided** at the same time. Both halves earn the mark.
- **Toleration was a political tool**, not a moral position. The Edict of Nantes bought domestic peace.
- Use the **witchcraft peak (1580-1650)** as dated evidence of social and religious strain, not as colour.