**PROTESTANT REFORMATION**

The Protestant Reformation was a 16th century movement that altered the course of European and world history in a number of different ways. This movement led to the eventual influence and demise of the previously powerful Catholic Church. People were now able to worship God as they believed and they no longer relied on the Catholic Church for guidance with religious matters. Most importantly, people began to leave the religious strife that was taking place in their European homelands and they headed west to America to worship God as they pleased.

**Martin Luther’s Ideas**

Martin Luther was a former Catholic monk who wrote the 95 Thesis document and nailed it on the door of the Catholic Church of Wittenberg. Once this happened many people all throughout Germany began to react to his convictions. Though Martin Luther was not the only voice of the Reformation, he was certainly one of the top figures that influenced the vast changes which resulted.

Martin Luther’s new ideas were extremely revolutionary and they threatened the power of the Pope and the ruling monarchs who depended upon the Catholic Church to maintain their power. Luther expressed the ideas that people could not buy themselves into heaven by purchasing forgiveness for their sins from the Catholic Church. He exposed the church for what he believed to be corrupt. Many Catholic rulers and priests had grown rich off of these purchases, so they became alarmed by Luther’s Thesis. This document threatened their finances and their lives. Many different groups of people began to disregard the Catholic Church and decided to worship as they pleased. Many Catholic priests and rulers became alarmed.

**Religious Differences**

Even though people were worshiping as they believed, the Protestant Reformation brought about a new set of problems. Catholicism refused to let go of its power and they fought hard to keep their dominance over the people. Different protestant denominations began to spring up and they were in conflict with other Christian groups about the matter of how best to worship God.

People all throughout Europe began to engage in bloody conflicts over their religious disagreements. Catholics fought against the Protestants and rulers fought against various Christian groups that did not affiliate with their particular beliefs.

**Religion in the New World?**

In the midst of all of this religious strife, the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal were sending explorers out into the world to establish trade routes to India. Eventually, Spanish explorers discovered the Americas and some people began to migrate to the new world to find fame and fortune. When other European nations learned about these new discoveries they began to colonize various areas of the world as well. Exploration expeditions began to spring up in England and other European countries and the age of exploration was established. This development was important because it allowed many early settlers to leave Europe and travel to the Americas.

Many religious groups had then become targets for the ruling powers. They decided to travel to the New World to avoid this problem