

Martin Luther (1483 - 1546)

Martin Luther was a German monk and teacher of theology (religion). He troubled about the possibility of not going to heaven. He led a strict life, but was worried about sin. Luther read the writings of early Christian theologians, including St. Augustine, and the Bible. He found the answer he was looking for in Paul's Letter to the Romans (Romans 1:17 - "The righteous shall by his faith.") Only faith (in the ultimate goodness of Jesus), not good deeds, could save a person. No good works, rituals, etc. would save a person if they did not believe.

**Martin Luther prepares to burn the papal bull.**

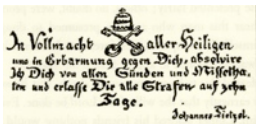
Overall, Luther was a rather crude man. He had no trouble with talking about taking up arms against those who opposed him. He also saw fit to use foul language to combat evil. For example, he dismissed the Jewish rabbis' interpretations of Scripture as "Jewish piss and sh__." He thought his physical ailments were caused by the devil, who was trying to stop him. Before Martin Luther died, when he was very ill, he told his wife, "I am fed up with the world, and it with me. I am like a ripe stool, and the world is like a gigantic anus, and so we're about to let go of each other."

The Beginnings*Indulgences*

Tetzel, a friar, sold indulgences. Doctrines of indulgences taught that Christ and the saints had stored up a treasury of merit. Indulgences could reduce the amount of time spent in purgatory; did not bring forgiveness of sin. Indulgences were sold to raise money for the church's increasing expenses. (They were like car salesmen, and lied about them.)



Friar Tetzel would travel around selling indulgences to people.



A homemade indulgence certificate from Tetzel

(Although Erasmus fiercely attacked philandering and corruption among the clergy, his dislike of violent reform made it impossible for him to give anything but qualified support to Martin Luther. He remained loyal to the Church of Rome and wrote: "I laid a hen's egg; Luther hatched a bird of quite a different species.")

The 95 Theses

Luther began to question the Catholic Church. Some of his beliefs about the church were:

- People could not "buy off" their sins, only God could forgive sins.
- People were naturally sinful and should seek salvation by believing in God and doing good works
- Priests should be subject to the law the same as ordinary men and women
- Priests are not divine beings
- That **all** people should be allowed to read the Bible, not just priests. They should interpret the Bible for themselves. Their interpretation of the Bible is just as important as that of a Priest.



On October 31, 1517 Luther posted, on a church door in Wittenburg, his 95 theses saying salvation is achieved through faith alone. He just wanted the church to clean up their act, but the church didn't want to. (Posting things on the church door was really no big deal, that is where people posted all kinds of notices.) The church basically laughed at him, but the people didn't laugh.) The Church was mad, but the people followed Luther. These people became known as "Lutherans."

Diet of Worms

In 1520 Pope Leo X ordered Luther to give up his beliefs. Luther burned the order in front of a cheering crowd and was excommunicated by Leo X. In 1521 Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, declared Luther an outlaw when he wouldn't give up his views. Martin Luther went into hiding in a castle (castle of Frederick of Saxony, a German Prince) and translated New Testament into German, making it possible for more people to read the Bible.

Acceptance of Reforms

Some local German churches accepted Luther's ideas. Lutheranism won enormous support and spread throughout Europe because:

- People didn't like all their money going to Rome.
- They didn't like the Italians controlling all church property.
- German princes saw a chance to get church property. In 1529, German Princes issued a formal "protest" against efforts by the Church to suppress the reforms.

The reformers came to be known as "Protestants." They broke away from the Catholic Church, thus beginning the Protestant branch of Christianity.

2. What were Martin Luther's religious views?

3. In what way was Martin Luther a "crude" man? Explain the 2 of the statements that he made.

4. What were indulgences? Why do you think they became so popular?

5. Which of Martin Luther's disagreements with the Catholic Church do you think were most influenced by the Renaissance idea of humanism? Why?

6. What did Martin Luther do in response to his disagreement? What was the initial reaction?

7. What was the long-term impact of Martin Luther's break from the Catholic Church? What do we see today as a result of his "revolution"?