

# Martin Luther: The Making of a Reformation :



## **The Indulgences and John Tetzel :**

Proclaimed by Pope Leo X in behalf of the building of St. Peter's . A significant part of it was to go to repay loans by the Fuggers to Albrecht in the purchase of his ecclesiastical office. The matter of Indulgences was not debated, the debate moved rapidly from it and related matters such as the treasury of merit and purgatory to the matter of Papal and Conciliar vs. Scriptural authority over the Church. John Tetzel was a Dominican monk. When he set up to sell the indulgences in a nearby realm, Luther became upset at the ways he was leading people astray.

**The 95 Theses (Oct., 1517)** Influenced perhaps by Erasmus' *Julius Exclusus* – the sharp and witty style of the Theses was intended to provoke discussion, rather than make definitive doctrinal statements. Luther was in a touchy political situation

regarding Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz and Elector Frederick (with whose secretary, Spalatin, Martin had a close friendship and frequent correspondence.) They may have been written as an afterthought to a letter Luther had penned to the Archbishop complaining about the sale. Martin published a defense of the theses in August of 1518, by then he had already been accused of heresy – copies were sent to Staupitz and Pope Leo. In it Luther began to question Papal Authority

## **Defense before the Augustinians at Heidelberg (April, 1518)**

Officially Luther was along to support one of his students debating theses Luther had written regarding grace and human nature. We do not have a transcript of this debate, however we know he attacked Aristotelian reasoning with divine paradoxes – contrasting man created good, but diseased by sin. **Martin Bucer**, who would become the reformer of Strasbourg, was in the audience and was thoroughly enthralled by Luther. On the way home, Luther stopped by Erfurt where he was coldly received.

Luther was summoned to Rome in August, 1518, to answer accusations of heresy by the Dominicans, but his Prince, Frederick the Wise supported his desire to have a hearing in Germany before German judges, and refused the order from Rome. (Political matters at the Imperial Diet in Augsburg in 1518 were dominant and distracting factors for Rome – Emperor Maximilian was nearing death, and various sovereigns were campaigning to become his elected successor. The honor would fall to his nineteen year old grandson, the King of Spain, Charles V in 1519, after a heavily bribed election.)



**Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg (Oct, 1518)** was there attempting to persuade the Germans in a crusade against the Turks pressing from the East. A Dominican (who given different circumstances might have been an ally of Luther) met with Luther after the Diet. Their conversation quickly turned to Papal authority and the nature of the church. Cajetan lost his temper, and ordered Luther out until he recant. Frederick continued to stand behind Luther.

**The Tower Experience (1519?)** Occurred it seems according to Martin's statements to have taken place about this time. Luther had finally grasped the principle of Justification by Faith, which transformed his own heart as well as his message.

**Debate with John Eck at Leipzig (July, 1519)** Luther was actually accompanying his colleague Karlstadt in this debate between rival universities. Melancthon was also there. When finally Eck attacked Luther, Martin had his chance to speak. Debate grew fierce over church authority, Eck arguing the Pope as Christ's appointed head from the church fathers. Luther countered from Scripture arguing the consensus of the faithful – the conciliar tradition – the gathering of Bishops. Eck appealed to tradition – how could God let the Church go astray. P. 174 Luther brought up the Greek Church which didn't acknowledge Rome – and the great Church councils at Nicaea, Ephesus and Chalcedon. Eck accused Luther of siding with the heretics Wyclif and Hus. (Hussite armies have ravaged Southern Germany.) Then Eck asserted that if Luther accepted part of their views, he was guilty of all their heresy. Then he pressed Luther as to whether the Council of Constance (which condemned Hus) had erred. Luther admitted it seemed Councils could err. Eck asserted that if one could err, all could. Luther then drew a line in the sand – men and councils were to be tested by Scripture. Though the debate dragged on another week, on matters such as purgatory and the nature of true penance, Luther became convinced that Christ alone was the key to salvation. Generally Eck was considered the victor in this debate – but he had pushed Luther to recognize the key issue of the Reformation – the sole authority of Scripture. Luther left Leipzig with no intention to rid the church of the Papacy, but a war of books and pamphlets followed. Luther began to question Christian doctrine and sacraments from the position of Scripture.



### **Martin Luther's "seminal" works (1520):**

- *An Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* – Luther used his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to try to persuade the secular rulers to take the lead in using their God-given authority to reform the Church of the immorality of the popes and cardinals.
- *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* – Luther attacks the sacramental system of the church, rejecting the Mass as a sacrifice and challenging the sacramental concept of confirmation, marriage, ordination and divine unction – presenting his doctrine of faith in God's promises for righteousness. The publication of this book convinced Erasmus that there was no longer any conciliation between Luther and Rome.
- *A Treatise on The Freedom of a Christian* – Luther answers the question of "If we have no power to earn merit by doing good works, why should we live ethically in society?" by asserting the principles of Christian liberty and the Priesthood of all believers.

**The Papal Bull *Exsurge Domine*** was issued by Pope Leo X on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1520, giving Luther 60 days to repent. Leo was hunting Boar at his hunting lodge – it begins by stating that “Arise O lord, a wild boar is trying to demolish thy vineyard. . .” The Bull was not finally delivered to Luther until October 3<sup>rd</sup>, after it had been published in every city, and many of his books burned.



**Martin Luther Burns the Bull** at a rally of Wittenberg students, summoned by Melancthon on Dec 10<sup>th</sup>, 1520 a bonfire was made of volumes of canon law and books by Luther’s foes. Luther tossed onto the fire a copy of Leo’s Bull.

**Luther was excommunicated** by Papal Bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem* on January 3, 1521 and orders were given to burn all his books.

**The Diet of Worms – Charles V (April, 1521)** The new Holy Roman



Emperor was persuaded by Frederick the Wise to allow Luther to appear at the Diet and defend his writings. Fears of a repeat of Hus’ betrayal at Constance lingering, bearing an Imperial safe conduct, Luther was escorted by Knights of Franz von Sickingen to Worms, travelling in small covered cart. His books piled in a window, in the crowded meeting room of the Bishop’s palace, Luther was asked to acknowledge he had written them. Then he was asked to recant. Luther asked time to reconsider. He had hoped for a chance to argue his case. But that had been denied him. He needed time to frame an answer that would be an argument as well. The next day he discriminated. Not all his works were the same sort. Some were accepted Christian doctrine.

Some were against the foul doctrines and evil living of papists. He could not recant of these. Some were attacks on individuals. He was a man and he could err. Only let his errors be proved by Scripture and he would revoke the errors. He continued: “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason (I do not believe in the authority of either popes or councils by themselves, for it is plain they have often erred and contradicted each other) in those scriptures I have presented, I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me, Amen.” Here he stood.

The emperor chose to remain with the traditions of his ancestors. Luther stood condemned. But he would honor the safe conduct. But he did not offer any praise for any pope, or assertion of papal authority. Charles V would be distracted by other things happening in his realms and would not rigorously pursue Luther. But now Luther was an outlaw.



**Kidnapped to Wartburg** - Luther left Worms guarded by twenty knights. His party was set upon by horsemen who kidnapped him at bow-point and took him off to Wartburg where he was hidden under the name Junker Georg. In exile for his own safety, isolated from a Reformation that would continue for a time without him – he would study and translate the Word into German, and write numerous treatises.

Luther’s disguise as a Knight