

History

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

Luther in Wittenberg and Worms

Enquiry: What was Luther trying to achieve?

Mr Sellin



The Ninety-five Theses

Martin Luther was a German monk who was also a professor of religious studies in Wittenberg. Luther was angered by the behaviour of Johann Tetzel. In order to raise money for the rebuilding of Rome, Tetzel was travelling around Germany selling indulgences, and was accused of making money for himself as well. In response, Luther wrote a document attacking Tetzel, and the practice of selling indulgences. This document contained ninety-five different points of disagreement, so was named the **Ninety-five Theses**. Many of these were not brand new criticisms, and many were focused on the selling of indulgences. Luther had not intended for the theses to form a massive revolution against the Catholic Church, but rather just to begin a debate with other professors. Nevertheless, the Theses played an important role in the Reformation.



The Leipzig Debate and excommunication

For two years after the publication of the Ninety-five Theses, Luther continued to write and speak about his dislike of indulgence selling. Another university professor, Johann Eck, began to openly criticise Luther's beliefs. In 1519, the two men held a formal debate in the town of Leipzig. During the debate Luther was accused of serious disagreements with the Church's teaching, including an accusation that the Pope held no special powers. These views were believed to be **heretical**. Nevertheless, Luther admitted that he believed that he was right, and would not back down. When the Pope made his hatred of Luther very clear by publishing a **papal bull** attacking him, Luther decided to burn it instead! In response, Luther was **excommunicated**, but that did not worry him as he believed that God was on his side.



The Diet of Worms

Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor was the most powerful Catholic ruler in Europe. He was becoming concerned that Luther was not only refusing to back down, but was also gaining supporters. Charles V decided to bring Luther to a meeting (called a **Diet**) of German princes in the town of Worms. Here, Luther was again asked if he stood by what he believed, and once again Luther refused to back down. Luther repeatedly stated that he disagreed with the Pope and that only the Bible, not the Catholic Church, contained God's true teaching for those on Earth. Luther was forced to leave quickly from the Diet of Worms, and was kidnapped by soldiers working for a ruler (Frederick the Wise) who supported him and wanted to keep him safe. Luther went into hiding at Wartburg Castle, where he began to write and translate.



Glossary

Diet: the German word for a meeting of rulers

Excommunicated: to be officially thrown out of the Catholic Church;
believed to be a certainly going to hell after death

Heretical: words and actions are heretical if they strongly disagree with
the Church's teachings

Papal bull: a letter written by the Pope, with copies sent around Europe

Theses: statements that make up an argument, similar to bullet points



Comprehension Questions

1. Who was Johann Tetzel?
2. Why did Luther write the Ninety-five Theses?
3. How did Luther respond to accusations that he held heretical views at the Leipzig Debate?
4. Why was Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, concerned about Martin Luther?

