

A Man Named Martin

Part 1: The Man

Session Three

Pope Leo X

[Pope Leo X](#): This article gives a biography of Pope Leo X, all that he was involved in, and why he needed so much money.

[The Medici Family](#): This article traces the history and powerful influence of the Medici family, of which Pope Leo X was a member.

[St. Peter's Basilica](#): This article gives the history of the basilica, from Peter's martyrdom to its construction in Luther's time.

[The Roman Catholic Church in the Late Middle Ages](#): This article describes the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, the various offices, and monastic movements.

Indulgences

[Roman Teachings about Indulgences](#): DELTO (Distance Education Leading to Ordination) video with Dr. Paul Robinson (Church History 2, Volume 3).

[When did Indulgences Begin?](#) DELTO (Distance Education Leading to Ordination) video with Dr. Paul Robinson (Church History 2, Volume 4).

[John Tetzel](#): This brief biography describes the Dominican monk who stirred Luther's response to indulgences.

[How did Luther Come to Preach Against Indulgences?](#): DELTO (Distance Education Leading to Ordination) video with Dr. Paul Robinson (Church History 2, Volume 8).

[Image of an Indulgence](#): This is a link to an image of an indulgence. It is written in German, but you'll recognize the signature of Johannes Tetzel.

Frederick the Wise

[Heroes and Saints of the Reformation: Frederick the Wise \(1463-1525\)](#): This article introduces us to Frederick the Wise.

Religious Relics

Frederick the Wise boasted a collection of thousands of relics. Here are some links that provide more information about them:

[Top 10 Religious Relics](#): *Time* magazine looks at the lore and whereabouts of religious relics from Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. It includes the burial cloth of Jesus, Muhammad's beard, Mary's holy belt and tunic, John the Baptist's head, and the chains of St. Peter, among others.

[From St. Peter's Bones to Severed Heads: Christian Relics on Display](#): Here is a top 10 list of Christian relics that can be seen today.

95 Theses

[Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences](#): The text of the 95 Theses.

[Blest Halloween!](#) In this *Lutheran Witness* article, Rev. Mark Loest shows us it was no coincidence that Martin Luther chose October 31 as the day to nail his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

Printing Press

[Gutenberg's Invention](#): This article describes how Gutenberg's printing press worked.

[How Luther Went Viral](#): Five centuries before Facebook and the Arab Spring, social media helped bring about the Reformation.

[What a Difference a Half Millennium Makes!](#) In this *Lutheran Witness* article (October 5, 2010), Dr. Robert Kolb explores the way Luther was viewed during his life and throughout the centuries following his death. He closes with ideas on how congregations can prepare to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the posting of the 95 Theses on October 31, 2017.

Pope Leo X

<http://reformation500.csl.edu/bio/leo-x/>

Pope Leo X



Leo X was the last of the Renaissance popes before the dawn of the Reformation, but his role in the indulgence controversy left the indelible impression of his pontificate. Born Giovanni de' Medici in Florence on December 11, 1475, he was the second son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, patriarch of the powerful mercantile Medici family that had by the fifteenth century become prominent bankers and Florentine politicians. Leo's father set him on a course to ecclesiastical service at an early age. He was named apostolic protonotary in 1483 and cardinal deacon of Santa Maria in Dominica in 1489. He received the best of humanist education in his father's house, the most prominent of his tutors being Marsilio Ficino and

Pico della Mirandola. After studying theology and canon law at Pisa between 1489 and 1492, he took up residence as cardinal in Rome. He would return to Florence later that year after the death of his father and live with his older brother, Pietro, until the family was exiled in 1494 as a result of the uprising spearheaded by Girolomo Savonarola. The tumultuous exile of the Medicis from Florence led the young cardinal to travel across the Europe of his day, visiting France, Holland, and Germany between 1494 and 1500, which exposed him to the flourishing Renaissance humanism outside of Italy. When his brother Pietro died in 1503, Leo became the head of the Medici family and soon took a central role in Italian politics. He was named legate of Bologna and Romagna in October 1511, which left him in charge of the papal forces there. He was imprisoned in Ravenna in 1512 by the French, but escaped and would help reestablish the Medicis in Florence with a peaceful revolution that ended their exile on September 14, 1512. The course of events established Leo as an adroit political mind and made him a candidate for the papal tiara vacated when the reigning pontiff, Julius II, died on February 21, 1513. A conclave opened on March 4 to choose a replacement. Composed of 25 cardinals—excluding the nine associated at the time with the council in Pisa—the

conclave selected Leo in part because the older cardinals believed his recurrent ill health would lead to a short tenure and in part because his political wherewithal might help Rome drive the Spanish and the French out of papal lands in Naples and Milan. Leo was elected on March 11 at the age of 37. His reign proved far from peaceful, as evidenced by the fact that several cardinals hatched a plot to poison him in 1517, for which one was killed, numerous others imprisoned, and the Roman curia filled with new cardinals supportive of his rule.

The primary electoral capitulation Leo made was to bring to completion the Fifth Lateran Council, which his predecessor had convened in 1512. Lateran V began in opposition to a rival council in Pisa, which was convoked under the leadership of nine dissident cardinals and supported by French royalty and clergy. Julius designated it a *conciliabulum*, or “pseudo-council,” and under pressure called a council of his own in Rome. There were numerous goals for the Lateran council, including the healing of the Pisan schism, eradication of heresy, pacification of Christian princes at odds with Rome, preparation of a crusade, and the general reform of Christendom, specifically that of the papacy, cardinals, and curia. In March 1514, Leo published a bull, *Supernae dispositionis arbitrio*, addressing the reform of the curia, but never sought to enforce its measures. He carried the council through to its end on March 16, 1517.

One significant outcome of Lateran V brokered by Leo was the end to the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges. A measure taken in 1438 at the height of the conciliar controversy to insure administrative and fiscal independence for the French church in exchange for its support of then-pope Eugenius IV against the Council of Basel, the Pragmatic Sanction had caused continual tensions between Rome and France. During the course of the council, Leo negotiated a plan that would give the French king the right to nominate all French bishops, abbots, and priors, while granting the pope the prerogative of naming all vacant French benefices in the curia as well as other French-related benefices. The new agreement was reached in the 1516 Concordat of Bologna, ratified by the council six months later with the bull *Primitiva*, and would remain in effect until the 1780 French Revolution.

As pontiff, Leo became known for his patronage of the arts in Renaissance Rome and the luxurious lifestyle associated with it. He infamously said, “God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it.” Under his tenure, Leo continued the project of rebuilding St. Peter’s Basilica, begun under Julius II, and commissioned famed Renaissance artists Michelangelo and Raphael for the task. Raphael was also charged with decorating the

pontifical palaces and painting the tapestries in the Sistine Chapel. In addition to his role as purveyor of art, Leo spared no expense in collecting rare books, manuscripts, and gems. He enjoyed hunting and would take an extensive papal entourage with him to join in the activities. The papal household itself was quite large and cost upwards of 100,000 ducats a year. His expenditures exhausted the papal treasury and put it 400,000 ducats in debt by the end of his pontificate.

Leo's reign saw the start of the Reformation as a result of his handling of the indulgence controversy. Due to the debt associated with his pontificate, the Medici pope had been unable to commit sufficient resources to Julius's project of rebuilding St. Peter's. When the archbishopric of Mainz became available and Albrecht of Brandenburg sought the see, Leo saw an opportunity to resume the St. Peter's project by authorizing the sale of indulgences in Albrecht's territories. Half of the proceeds would go to repaying Albrecht's debt to the Fugger bankers for the loan he needed to purchase the see, while the other half would go to rebuilding St. Peter's. In 1515, Leo renewed the decree authorizing the sale of indulgences first published by his predecessor. As a result, Albrecht commissioned the noted preacher of indulgences, Leipzig Dominican John Tetzel, to proclaim the sale and it was Tetzel whom Luther chiefly targeted in the 1517 *95 Theses*.

Upon receiving an opinion of the theses from the faculty at Mainz, Albrecht filed charges against Luther with Rome. The investigation into Luther's teaching began in summer 1518, when Leo's court summoned the Augustinian monk and Wittenberg professor to answer for himself, before sending Cardinal Cajetan to interview Luther in Augsburg. Leo directed Cajetan to seize Luther and bring him to Rome, though Frederick the Wise persuaded Cajetan to relent. The proceedings against Luther would resume again in earnest in 1519 after Leo published a bull, *Cum postquam*, that rejected Luther's criticisms of the papal authority to grant indulgences. Later that year at Leipzig, Luther came to denounce papal authority in the church and the papal decretals supporting it, leading to an escalation of the controversy.

The *95 Theses* did not directly attack Leo, but they did call into question the right of the papacy to grant indulgences, a point that Luther's opponents repeatedly raised in their rejoinders. Luther sought to distract attention from the question of papal authority, even dedicating his explanation of the theses on indulgences, the 1518 *Resolutiones*, to the pope himself. In response to the diplomatic efforts of Karl von Miltitz, a papal

chamberlain, Luther agreed to write a letter to the sitting pope expressing remorse for the indulgence affair, which he drafted in 1519 but never sent. A year later, Miltitz prevailed upon Luther to try one last time to mend the breach with Leo by sending him a conciliatory letter, attached to the 1520 treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*. The so-called “Open Letter to Leo X,” composed in German rather than Latin and intended for popular publication, directed blame for the affair at the Roman curia, which Luther believed to be manipulating the pope and not to have the church’s best interests in mind.

Leo’s court finally brought Luther to the point of condemnation in 1520, when it published the bull *Exsurge Domine* threatening him with excommunication if he did not appear in Rome within sixty days and recant of his teachings. The bull detailed a list of 41 errors, largely enumerated by Luther’s Leipzig combatant, John Eck, and was received in Wittenberg in October. On December 10, in accordance with the deadline stipulated, Luther and the Wittenberg students burned the bull along with the books of canon law in a symbolic gesture of defiance. Leo then followed through with the threat of excommunication in the January 1521 bull *Decet Romanum pontificem*, a judgment that would lead to Luther’s trial at Worms in April 1521 and his declaration by Charles V as a heretic and outlaw in the May 1521 Edict of Worms.

Leo would die of pneumonia later that year on December 1 and was buried in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. The legacy he left behind would remain permanently connected with his failures to stint the Reformation. His pontificate did not bring about the reforms anticipated by Lateran V, but instead deepened the fiscal and political problems in Rome. This precipitated the decision to authorize the sale of indulgences that stimulated the onset of the Reformation. His attempt to prosecute Luther’s teaching on indulgences and ultimately to excommunicate him did not eradicate Lutheran doctrine, but instead further splintered the Western church.

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THE MEDICI FAMILY

The Medici family, also known as the House of Medici, first attained wealth and political power in Florence in the 13th century through its success in commerce and banking. Beginning in 1434 with the rise to power of Cosimo de' Medici (or Cosimo the Elder), the family's support of the arts and humanities made Florence into the cradle of the Renaissance, a cultural flowering rivaled only by that of ancient Greece. The Medicis produced four popes (Leo X, Clement VII, Pius IV and Leon XI), and their genes have been mixed into many of Europe's royal families. The last Medici ruler died without a male heir in 1737, ending the family dynasty after almost three centuries.

BIRTH OF THE MEDICI DYNASTY

The Medici story began around the 12th century, when family members from the Tuscan village of Cafaggiolo emigrated to Florence. Through banking and commerce, the Medicis rose to become one of the most important houses in Florence. Their influence had declined by the late 14th century, however, when Salvestro de' Medici (then serving as gonfaliere, or standard bearer, of Florence) was forced into exile.

Did You Know?

When Cosimo I (1519-1574) moved the Florentine administrative offices into a building known as the Uffizi, he also established a small museum. The building is now the site of Florence's famed Uffizi Gallery, home to many of the great Renaissance-era treasures amassed by the Medicis since the time of Cosimo the Elder.

Another branch of the family, descended from Salvestro's distant cousin Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, would begin the great Medici dynasty. Giovanni's elder son, Cosimo (1389-1464), rose to political power in 1434 and ruled Florence as an uncrowned monarch for the rest of his life. Known to history as Cosimo the Elder, he was a devoted patron of the humanities, supporting artists such as Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Donatello and Fra Angelico. During Cosimo's time, as well as that of his sons and particularly his grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492), Renaissance culture flourished, and Florence became the cultural center of Europe.

THE DESCENDANTS OF COSIMO DE' MEDICI

Lorenzo was a poet himself, and supported the work of such Renaissance masters as Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo (whom the Medicis commissioned to complete their family tombs in Florence). After Lorenzo's premature death at the age of 43, his eldest son Piero succeeded him, but soon infuriated the public by accepting an unfavorable peace treaty with France. After only two years in power, he was forced out of the city in 1494, and died in exile.

Thanks in part to the efforts of Piero's younger brother Giovanni (a cardinal at the time and the future Pope Leo X), the Medici family was able to return to Florence in 1512. The next few years marked the high point of Medici influence in Europe, as Leo X followed in his father's humanistic footsteps and devoted himself to artistic patronage. Piero's son, also named Lorenzo, regained power in Florence, and his daughter Catherine (1519-1589) would become queen of France after marrying King Henry II; three of her four sons would rule France as well.

A NEW MEDICI BRANCH COMES TO POWER

By the early 1520s, few descendants of Cosimo the Elder remained. Giulio de' Medici, the illegitimate son of Lorenzo the Magnificent's brother Giuliano,

abdicated power in 1523 to become Pope Clement VII, and the short and brutal rule of Alessandro (reputed to be Giulio's own illegitimate son) ended with his assassination in 1537. At this point, the descendants of Cosimo the Elder's brother (known as Lorenzo the Elder) came forward to launch a new Medici dynasty. Lorenzo's great-great-grandson Cosimo (1519-1574) became duke of Florence in 1537, then grand duke of Tuscany in 1569. As Cosimo I, he established absolute power in the region, and his descendants would rule as grand dukes into the 1700s.

Cosimo's elder son Francis succeeded his father, but proved a less effective ruler. His daughter Marie would become queen of France when she married Henry IV in 1600; her son would rule as Louis XIII from 1610-43. Francis' younger brother Ferdinand, who became grand duke in 1587, restored Tuscany to stability and prosperity. He also founded the Villa Medici at Rome and brought many priceless works of art to Florence.

THE MEDICI DYNASTY IN DECLINE

In general, the later Medici line renounced the older generation's republican sympathies and established more authoritarian rule, a change that produced stability in Florence and Tuscany but led to the region's decline as a cultural hub. After Ferdinand's son Cosimo II (who supported the work of the mathematician, philosopher and astronomer Galileo Galilei) died in 1720, Florence and Tuscany suffered under ineffectual Medici rule.

When the last Medici grand duke, Gian Gastone, died without a male heir in 1737, the family dynasty died with him. By agreement of the European powers (Austria, France, England and the Netherlands), control over Tuscany passed to Francis of Lorraine, whose marriage to Hapsburg heiress Maria Theresa of Austria would begin the long European reign of the Hapsburg-Lorraine family.

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St. Peter's Basilica

<http://www.vaticanstate.va/content/vaticanstate/en/monumenti/basilica-di-s-pietro/storia.paginate.1.html>

History



During Nero's great Christian persecution in 64 A.D., Saint Peter was martyred, crucified and buried in Caligula's Circus, as one reads in the Liber Pontificalis (I, 118), "via Aurelia (...) iuxta palatium Neronianum, in Vaticanum" (In the Vatican, in Via Aurelia opposite Nero's Palace). Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century) quotes a letter written by Gaius to Proclus, in which the presbyter invites his friend to Rome, claiming, "in the Vatican and in Via Ostiense, you will find the trophies of those who founded this Church." For this reason, the 2nd century aedicule which was intended to protect Saint Peter's shrine, and which was discovered during the excavations in the Vatican necropolis, was called "Gaius's Trophy". After Constantine's Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) Christians were allowed to construct places of worship.

Constantine himself authorized the building of the basilica in 324. It was intended to enclose "Gaius's Trophy" and to allow Peter's tomb to become the centre of the structure. Consecrated in 329, the great basilica appeared as a longitudinal building with a nave, four aisles and a transept. Outside, a staircase led to the four-sided portico in front of the basilica, known also as Paradise, with a fountain in the middle for the ablutions of the catechumens. Charlemagne, king of the Franks, was crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in this basilica on Christmas eve in the year 800. Pilgrims gathered in the basilica from the early 14th century, having travelled on foot from all over Europe to reverence the tomb of the "Prince of the Apostles".

When the Popes abandoned Rome during the Avignon schism (1309-1377), the basilica, which was one thousand years old by then, was showing signs of wear and deterioration. Although we have little information about these problems, we know for a fact that in the mid 15th century, Pope Nicholas V asked the architect Bernardo Rossellino to draw up a project for a new choir, outside the Constantinian apse. It was built to a height of about 1.5 metres.

By the early 16th century, the need to choose between restoring St Peter's or rebuilding it completely was unavoidable, so much so that the new Pope Julius II, elected in October 1503, decided to entrust this task to Donato Bramante in 1505, one of the greatest architects of his time.

Many of Bramante's drawings can be found in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. All of them have one feature in common: a square design with a Greek cross and four prominent apses. The square forms a cubical space and is covered in the centre by

a hemispheric dome. According to Arnaldo Bruschi (1984), the structure has a precise symbolism, which can be "schematised – in accord with an ancient, mostly Byzantine tradition – as a cube (the world) with four extending arms (the four parts of the world), and a dome above it (heaven)."

Work on the first pylon began with great ceremony on 18th April 1506, and foundations for the other three pylons were laid the following year. Construction halted, however, when Julius II (1513) and Bramante (1514) died; by then the basilica had reached the top of the four pylons. Several other proposals for St Peter's were drawn up over the next 40 years, in the midst of heated debate over whether the new St Peter's should have a central or longitudinal plan. Bramante and other Renaissance architects preferred the central plan, but the longitudinal plan or Latin cross conformed more to ecclesiastic tradition and would also cover the entire area of the ancient Constantinian basilica. As the four central pylons had already been built, Raphael (1514) and Antonio da Sangallo the Younger (1538) proposed a longitudinal plan, while Baldassarre Peruzzi (1520) favored a central plan. Finally in 1547, Pope Paul III commissioned Michaelangelo to propose a new design. His solution was to keep Bramante's original plan, thickening the pilasters and the external walls and creating niches and ledges by chiselling out the walls. A vast dome was to cover the central area, where the papal altar was to be placed. The building was finished, although the dome was not completed at Michelangelo's death in 1564. His pupil, Giacomo della Porta, finished building it with a few changes, such as raising the curve of the calotte. The dilemma over choosing between a central or a longitudinal plan was not yet definitely resolved, however. The Council of Trent, which ended in 1563, expressed a preference for longitudinal churches. Carlo Maderno was therefore asked to extend Michelangelo's original plan.

He achieved this by adding two bays, turning St Peter's floor plan into a Latin cross. Maderno also designed St Peter's "classical" façade, built between 1607 and 1612. Unfortunately it tended to hide Michelangelo's dome and reduce its visual impact. Bernini's square sought to resolve the problem with an optical effect that draws the dome forward.

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The Roman Catholic Church in the Late Middle Ages

<https://europeanhistory.boisestate.edu/latemiddleages/churchstructure/01.shtml>

THE CHURCH

Introduction

Was the late medieval Catholic Church different from the Church in earlier centuries? In a word: yes. Elsewhere you will read about the severe crises the Church underwent in the 14th and 15th centuries, but the 13th century saw fundamental changes as well. This is not the place to go into that history in detail, but broadly speaking during the 13th century Scholasticism came to the forefront and brought greater definition to Church doctrine in a great many areas. Along with this, a series of strong popes made the papacy far more effective than it had been previously; indeed, that century often appears in survey textbooks as "The Height of the Papacy" or the like. So it is worth looking at the late medieval Church as a historical entity distinct both from what went before and what came after.

Most people have a view of medieval Church hierarchy that is much like their view of medieval political hierarchy; that is, they view it as highly structured, centralized on a monarch, and generally oppressive. This view is wrong. Just plain wrong.

To try to counter-act this stereotype, this essay will look at the organization of the Roman Catholic Church not from the top down, and not exactly from the bottom up, but in terms of offices and groups. The essay closes with a brief overview of Church doctrine, particularly of the sacraments. All of this is by way of explanatory background to the narratives of other essays in this section.

The Priesthood

The priest was the foundation of the Catholic Church. Priests were the most numerous of all positions within the Church, and they were recognized in theology as the most basic and important. The word comes from the Greek, *presbyter*, and appears in the New Testament. The priest was the Church member closest to ordinary folk and is the Church official with whom they had the most frequent contact. Being a priest meant being in "holy orders."

There were several levels of holy orders, with priest being at the top end. The exact number varied a bit, with certain minor offices included or excluded depending on which writer is being read. The Council of Trent set the number at seven, so that's the list I give here: doorkeeper (janitor), reader, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, priest. In the medieval Church, holy orders was one of the seven sacraments, so this hierarchy, and the powers attendant upon it, was at the absolute core of what it meant to be Catholic.

Other orders that were sometimes included were tonsure, cantor, bishop (being considered separately from priest, though all bishops were priests), psalmist. In most cases, the lower orders were simply offices, specific duties carried out by youngsters (usually, but not always) who were one their way to becoming full priests. In the Greek Orthodox Church, by way of comparison, there were five orders: bishop, priest, deacon, subdeacon, and reader.

The orders were usually grouped into two main divisions: minor orders and major orders. With the Tridentine (Council of Trent) ordering, priest, deacon and subdeacon were major orders, and the others were minor. Only those in the major orders had full priestly powers.

Minor Orders

Taking minor orders was easy. It could be done by anyone and the restrictions placed on the major orders did not apply. Thus, you could be in minor orders

and not be required to be celibate. And you could leave minor orders if you chose. The great advantage of being in minor orders was that you were technically a member of the clergy, so you had those privileges.

The minor orders had by the late Middle Ages developed into an important role in the Church and in society at large. For example, just about everyone who entered any university anywhere entered minor orders. A great many "clergymen" in secular government had in fact only taken minor orders. Thus the Church had a tremendous influence in lay society, but by way of a body of men who were not particularly religious or interested in becoming religious. Minor orders had become for many a convenient doorway into a career in public service.

Priestly Duties

Once one became a priest, though, the rules—the formal rules, at least—changed significantly. The priest carried heavy duties and obligations; he also enjoyed significant protections from secular law, both criminal and economic. And while the behavior of some priests could be notoriously bad, the *expectation* was that the priest was to live an exemplary life. This, by the way, helps account for the strident anti-clerical tone you'll find in some writers: because the standards were so high, the criticisms were all the more severe when priests came up short of those standards.

The priest's main duty in theory was to care for his flock. This meant first and foremost the administration of sacraments. Instruction was provided at the point of catechism and not all priests were preachers. The sermon was not yet a regular part of church services, so the priest did not necessarily preach the Word of God or instruct his parishoners in proper practice of their religion. The network of relationships between the local priest and his flock were actually rather complex.

Parish Priest

Some priests were attached directly to a cathedral, or to a noble family, but most were assigned to a parish, the smallest and most basic physical division in Christendom. The parish was, typically, a single church serving a single community or neighborhood, staffed by a priest, plus one or more deacons, acolytes, etc., depending on size and wealth. This is also the level at which the Church's tithe was levied, so the parish priest was also in part a tax collector.

The parish itself was expected to provide the living for the priest. This is where part of the tithe went. Sometimes the parish church had attached lands that could be worked to provide food and perhaps a few items to sell.

Vicars

Not all priests were resident. Some were posted to a cathedral, working for a bishop, or were teaching at a university. The parish still had its needs, though, so a "vice-priest"—a "vicar"—was named. This person was typically only in minor orders and might be not at all well educated. He might, indeed, be little more than a local peasant who'd been packed off to a local monastery to learn the Latin elements of the Mass and sacraments by rote.

The vicar was given a portion—sometimes a very small portion—of the income from the parish. The rest was sent off to the priest. Since life at an episcopal court in a big city could be very expensive, some were given care of multiple parishes, so they could collect a greater income. This doling out was in the hands of the bishop and was a powerful perquisite of the office. Holding "pluralities" was widely held as a serious abuse within the Church, but it proved nearly impossible to get rid of the practice.

Bishops

Almost from the beginning of the Christian Church, the bishop (Greek, *episcopos*) was the key to organization and government. The Church reflected the quintessentially urban nature of ancient civilization in that a bishop was always

associated with, and resided in, a city. The city had authority over a surrounding region, and the episcopal organization of the Church followed this practice, which persisted right through the Middle Ages.

The Cathedral

The bishop's seat was both literally where he sat and was the symbolic center for his authority, both worldly and spiritual. The Greek word is "cathedra", which is where we get the word cathedral. A cathedral is simply the structure that houses the bishop's throne. There are many churches in Europe, but only some are cathedrals, because those churches are the home of bishops.

The See

The physical region over which a particular bishop has authority is called the "see". The etymology is a little confusing, since it comes from the Latin for seat, "sedes", and so actually has the same origin as cathedra. But the late medieval usage is consistent: a "see" is the geographical area encompassed by a particular bishop. He has no authority outside his see.

Archbishops

An archbishop was simply a special form of bishop. As certain cities in the late Roman Empire were of especial importance, certain bishops gained special authority. A great city like Milan, for example, had administrative authority over a number of towns in northern Italy. Many of these towns had their own bishops, so the Bishop of Milan naturally acquired an authority over them. This is how the title of archbishop developed.

Episcopal Duties

A bishop was in fact a priest and had priestly duties toward his own congregation. Most bishops were busy men, though, and left the job of administering sacraments to the local parish around the cathedral to various deacons and "chapter priests", which consisted of a staff of priests attached to the

cathedral. The bishop might, however, very likely perform services for ranking nobility, important visitors, and perhaps the wealthy patricians of the town.

Beyond these immediate priestly duties, the bishop was charged with supervising the clergy in his see. It was the bishop who ordained (or approved the ordination) of the parish priests in his see. He was supposed to hold reviews and investigations (failure to do this was one source of criticism from reformers).

As a higher authority, the bishop had his own ecclesiastical court, which heard complaints and petitions. Also, the clergy were exempt (to varying degrees in different countries) from prosecution in secular courts, so all sorts of cases that we would think of as being civil or criminal would up in the bishop's courts, if a clergyman were involved. As you might guess, this too was a sore point with reformers.

The bishop also was a great landowner, for over the centuries pious Christians had donated estates to the Church. As such, he had to collect taxes, supervise villages, and even raise armies, for some estates came complete with castles and knights. In fact, in some highly urbanized areas, a bishop had entire towns under his jurisdiction. This made bishops as powerful or more powerful than the secular lords around them.

The bishop was the supervisor of the monks and monasteries in his see. He either appointed abbots, or approved their election. He adjudicated disputes among them. Actual powers varied with the type of order. For example, the Franciscans were supposedly responsible only directly to the pope himself, whereas the Benedictines had for a long time been under the authority of bishops. A bishop typically never interfered with the internal activities of a monastery, but he controlled in a more general way. For example, he had to approve the foundation of a new monastery.

A bishop had many other duties as well, but one in particular is relevant to this course: the bishop was the primary person responsible for the suppression of heresy in his see. That is, it was the bishop who enforced orthodoxy, to the extent that it was enforced at all. In this respect, as in many others, the bishop was very like a secular prince. What he chose to tolerate was tolerated. What he chose to persecute was persecuted. How effective all of this was varied considerably with time, circumstance, and the competence of the bishop himself, but he was the one who set the tone.

Monks

While priests and bishops can be traced back to the Church in the days of the Apostles, monks came later. Not until the 4th century did monks appear, first in Egypt then in other areas of the Near East. Monasticism came to the West a century later under the hand of St Benedict of Nursia.

In the beginning, monks were laymen who desired to lead a religious life but who did not want to become priests. The Benedictines were the first great order in Western Europe, and it was the Benedictines who set the tone and standard for monasticism for several centuries. Later orders of note are the Cistercians and the Premonstratensians. The monastic orders had a long tradition, going all the way back to Cluny in the 10th century, of being leaders of movements for reform of the Church and clergy.

Monks need to receive sacraments too, of course, so it wasn't too long before we start finding monks who are also ordained as priests. By the time of our course, a great many monks (though not all) were at least in minor orders. This is why monks were protected from secular law the same as were priests.

Friars

Friar comes from the Latin for brother ("frater"). They are simply another kind of monk. The two principal orders are the Franciscans and the Dominicans, both

founded in the early 13th century. In both cases, the basic values were similar to any other monastic order. The chief difference was the friars took preaching as a central mission. Instead of retreating from the world, as other monks did, the friars went into the world, to preach the Word of God. Under the influence of St Francis, the Franciscans placed an especial emphasis on poverty, relying only on begging for income, for which reason they are sometimes called a mendicant order (mendicant=beggar). The emphasis of the Dominicans was, from very early, on teaching, and they became the leading scholars of the late Middle Ages. Because they were authorities on theology and doctrine, they also tended to get tangled up in efforts to repress heresy, including the Inquisition.

Ironically, the friars quickly grew wealthy as the nobility showered them with lands and other gifts. This produced a split within the Franciscans, between those who wished to keep to Francis' original vision of poverty (the Spiritual Franciscans) and those (the Conventuals) who believed that wealth owned by the order rather than the individual did not corrupt the order's principles. This split was especially bitter in the 15th century.

Popes

The Pope is the Bishop of Rome. Period. He's not even an archbishop. He's the bishop of the city of Rome. How the bishop of Rome developed into being the leader of the entire Roman Catholic Church (and claiming leadership of the Greek Orthodox and other churches as well), is beyond the scope of this course. I have a separate essay over in my Western Civ site (<http://history.boisestate.edu/westernciv/papacy/>) that you can read if you wish.

Government of the Church

Bishops

The bishop had his own court, where he heard any number of cases involving matters of religion. The episcopal, or consistory court also heard cases that

pertained to temporal matters. A bishop typically held lands and might have authority over estates, villages and even towns. He could levy taxes there, exactly like a nobleman, and could even raise armies. There was a good deal of tension between the bishop as a lay authority and the princes and great towns, especially in Germany.

College of Cardinals

The College of Cardinals held special powers, the most crucial of which was the power to elect the pope. Only the College of Cardinals could do this. Beyond this, the cardinals had become the upper administrative staff of the Roman Catholic Church. They headed up high courts of appeal, administered its financial wealth, corresponded with bishops all across Europe, and even acted as papal representatives to royal courts.

Papal Curia

The Papal Curia is the "government" of the Roman Catholic Church. As just stated, the highest positions were generally held by cardinals, but each area employed a large staff of secretaries and other clerks. This central government had two focal points. One was the administration of the Church, particularly in regard to finance, law, and doctrine. The other was administration of the Papal States, a band of territories running across central Italy. In this latter capacity, the papacy was much like any other Italian principate. In the former capacity, it was a government unlike any other in Europe.

Sources of Religious Authority

There were three sources of authority for the medieval Church: Scriptures, the Church Fathers (Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and Pope Gregory I), and the councils. The Scriptures were authority because they were the direct word of God. The writings of the Fathers were authority because each of these men were saints and were held to have a privileged position in the development of Church

doctrine. The councils had authority because they were representatives of the Church as a whole, the Body of Christ, and as such could not err.

The pope was not a source of authority in doctrine or practice, at least not in theory. When the pope spoke formally, issuing a decree, then his words held much authority, but it was as yet only one faction of the Church that claimed that the pope when speaking formally (*ex cathedra*) had the same authority as a council and could not err. That doctrine came to be more widely promoted after the Council of Trent, but it did not become formal Church doctrine until the 19th century.

Doctrine

The Sacraments

There were seven sacraments, or at least there were seven generally recognized (the number was not set formally until Trent): baptism, catechism, marriage, confession, communion, holy orders, and last rites. These had developed into general use over the centuries; as the reformers were to note, only some of these can be found in the Bible. It was not until the Council of Trent in the 16th century that the Catholic Church formally declared these seven were necessary to salvation.

Besides the sacraments, there were sacramentals. These were rituals and practices that had a sacred aura or sacred aspect about them, but which were not necessary to salvation. Blessing a place or an object, for example, is a sacramental, but not a sacrament. It was, of course, quite easy for ordinary folk to be a bit vague about what was required and what was merely admirable.

Papal Infallibility

No, Christians did not always believe a pope could not err. Remember that the pope is simply the Bishop of Rome and in that sense is just like any other bishop. It was only over the course of centuries that the Bishop of Rome came to hold a

position of special eminence and to claim that this gave it special authority. These claims were put forward even in the early Middle Ages, but only sporadically and mostly in connection with specific situations.

Further into the Middle Ages the papacy developed the metaphor of the two swords, a view of authority that was split between the spiritual and the secular. Popes were supreme only in the spiritual realm, while kings had authority in the secular. Naturally there was much discussion over exactly where and when to draw the line between these two realms. In addition, popes began to argue that when there was a direct conflict between the two, the spiritual realm must always trump the worldly.

It was this background that formed the basis for claims put forward from the 1200s onward that the papacy had to be considered the supreme authority within Christendom. Once that argument was formulated, it was a short step to infallibility, for surely God would not let His Church be led astray by His own vicar on earth.

Even then, though, two factors mitigated this claim to infallibility. One was that it was restricted in scope. No one, not even papal advocates, was so foolish as to think popes were not fallible human beings. The doctrine, then, specified that the pope was infallible only when speaking *ex cathedra*; that is, "from the chair", which is to say only when he was issuing a formal statement. This left plenty of room for popes to be fallible on a personal basis without that providing grounds for a crisis in the Church.

Second, the doctrine was not uncontested. Plenty of secular rulers argued that this infallibility business applied only to matters of doctrine and could not be extended into other spheres of life. Moreover, some theologians continued to argue that even in matters of doctrine a pope could err. They argued that the true divine guidance came to humanity by way of the Church itself—the body of believers. Since God couldn't communicate via "everyone", the theorists resorted

to that very medieval institution of a representative assembly: in this case, a general council. This entity was indeed the "Church assembled", or at least was a widely-accepted surrogate. It was this, these other theorists argued, that could not err for it would be led to truth by the Holy Spirit.

As you will see, these were not theoretical arguments. With the popes first resident in Avignon, and then with the Church divided between rival popes, the question of papal authority versus the authority of councils versus the authority of kings was a practical and highly volatile question for the entire span of our course.

Conclusion

The position of the Catholic Church in the late Middle Ages has attracted much attention from historians, mainly as a way of looking for the origins of the Reformation. There's nothing wrong with that approach, but it does an injustice, I think, to these two centuries to view them as nothing more than prelude. If nothing else, it tends to lead one to look for failures, for what went wrong, which leads to a highly skewed view of the situation at the time.

In this essay I have steered clear of such considerations in order to present the Church as it was in its functioning, without judging strengths and weaknesses. You should note, however, that this approach is also skewed. For, leaving aside the Reformation, the people living *at the time* were deeply critical of the Church, at every level and in nearly every aspect. Certainly there were criticisms of the upper hierarchy—the crisis within the Papacy was only the most blatant of the problems there—but also at the lower levels, including the friars and monks more generally, parish priests, and fellow Christians. One finds these criticisms right through from 1300 to 1500 and from one end of Europe to the other.

Were the criticisms more significant than in earlier times? That's difficult to say, because our sources become more plentiful in these centuries, and literacy spreads more broadly, but the consensus among historians is that the level was

indeed greater. That is, there were more criticisms and they were more serious criticisms.

All that having been said, however, one must not let it obscure the fact that for many Christians religious life went on much as before. Indeed, there's a good deal of evidence for an increase in participation and in enthusiasm. This can be seen in the mania for saints' relics, religious processions, and outbreaks of popular religious expression (e.g., the Flagellants). People criticized the Church, but they don't appear to have rejected either the Church or Christianity. The concern of the critics was still reform, marginal or radical, and not rejection.

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Roman Teachings about Indulgences

<http://media.ctsfw.edu/Video/ViewDetails/685>.

PAUL: That is very clear now. Thanks. I have one more question, and then I'll let someone else have a chance to chime in. As I read the theses, I notice that Luther is very critical of what preachers are saying about indulgences, but he never really says what indulgences are. I think I know, but I'd like to hear your explanation. What were indulgences? Was it the doctrine, or was it the practice of selling them that was so offensive to Luther? What was the church teaching about indulgences at the time?

DR. PAUL ROBINSON: That's a good question because there was a real gap between the official church doctrine on indulgences and what preachers like *Tetzel actually ended up saying. This is one of the things Luther points out, and we'll get to the thesis in a minute. But we talk about indulgences usually in history of the Reformation as the Church selling forgiveness. That's technically not true. What they were actually selling was release from performing the penances required from confession. And this gets into the whole history of penance in the Middle Ages. And it's something Luther is concerned about. For example, in Thesis 34 he says, "For the grace conveyed by these indulgences relate simply to the penalties of the sacramental satisfactions decreed merely by man." In other words, this is precisely Luther's point. Talk about indulgences for what they are. They're taking away the penalties imposed by a priest or bishop or by the Pope after confession. And that makes a lot more sense when you know the history of the sacrament of penance. Originally, penance was seen as being two parts that you confess your sin; you receive forgiveness. And then of course, you will want to do something to show you're sorry. Now if you've stolen something, what you do is obvious. You give it back. But when it comes to confessing other sins where there is nothing to give back or pay back, it became a little more difficult. And so penances became assigned, and they became a little more arbitrary. It would be saying a certain number prayers, rather than giving something back. But the original idea was simply a demonstration of contrition, a demonstration of wanting to right what was wrong, change what you had done in the first place. That was, apparently, a pretty difficult idea to get across to the average people. At the very least, it wouldn't sell many indulgences. And there's another issue beyond that which is a so-called plenary indulgence. And Luther mentions this in Thesis 20. "Therefore the pope, in speaking of the plenary

remission of all penalties, does not mean all in the strict sense but only those imposed by himself." A plenary indulgence means a full indulgence. It means it gets rid of all the penalties that have been imposed upon you up to that point. This is another thing that Luther said even in terms of official church teaching, there's a problem here. The pope can only remit the penalties he's imposed. It can't really be a full remission of the penalties assigned and penants. So on the one hand Luther is pointing out that the official church doctrine is being lost in what's being taught. And he's also -- we'll get to this in a minute -- he's also getting to some issues of what the church has said that may not be correct in defending this theology of indulgences. Finally, on what's actually being taught, this is really one of the more interesting theses, Thesis 27. "There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of purgatory immediately the money clinks into the bottom of the chest." That apparently is what *Tetzel is preaching, or as another translation puts it, "When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from preparatory springs." This is really one of the ways that preachers tried to sell the indulgences because they have a problem. Once you've bought an indulgence for yourself, you're done. Well, or are you? They decided that you could also buy them for your dead relatives, and that your purchase of an indulgence in their name would get them out of purgatory. So you see how the marketing kind of rubs up against the theology, and that's really a big part of the problem in this history of indulgences as Luther pointed out.

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When Did Indulgences Begin?

<http://media.ctsfw.edu/Video/ViewDetails/686>.

JOSHUA: Hello, Professor. I'm glad Paul is giving me a chance now. My name is Joshua, and I'm serving in a small rural community in Wyoming. Our congregation members enter discussion about church history every once in a while, and I find I'm not always as well versed as I'd like to be to help answer their questions. So I've been looking forward to this class. I know that all of church history is important to know if we are to understand the confessions properly. So let me begin with a question which explores a time earlier than Luther's. We have been discussing with the medieval church said about indulgences. But I wonder whether this idea was part of the early church's teaching before the medieval age. When did indulgences begin?

DR. PAUL ROBINSON: As mentioned in my last lecture, the idea of indulgences goes back to the practice of penance, that you confess your sins, and to demonstrate your real sorrow over your sins, you're assigned some sort of penance to do. That became a very common idea in the early Middle Ages, especially under the influence of the Irish monks. What happened to indulgences, though, that made them an issue for Luther really has to do with the Crusades, believe it or not. When the pope called for a crusade, when he called for soldiers to go to the Holy Land to take it back from the Muslims, one of the problems was how to encourage people to do this. So the pope decided that anyone who would offer to go on crusade could receive the so-called plenary indulgence. I mentioned that in the last lecture, too. That simply means a full indulgence. It's remission of all the penalties that you've incurred up to that point in your life. The idea being that going on Crusade and, very possibly not coming back alive, was a big enough sacrifice to merit the cancellation of all previous penalties that have been imposed in confession. So Crusaders could get this plenary indulgence. But then the practice began of having one person pay for another to go on crusade. This is very similar to what happened in our own U.S. civil war where people who were called up to serve could pay someone else to go in their place. In the Crusades, too, it was very expensive to outfit a Knight for a crusade so very often, a rich merchant would pay for someone else to go. Then the question arose, of course, does the person paying also get the indulgence. And the answer was: of course, why not. And so what happened was gradually that payment from

one person to the crusader simply became a payment to the church to receive the indulgence. So what began as a reward for going on crusade eventually came to involve a direct cash payment to get this indulgence. Part of the problem with this was how to justify it theologically. The idea of an indulgence was clear enough that it's replacing the penalties imposed in confession, but now, what's the rationale behind the plenary indulgences? What's really happening here? And what the theologians in the Middle Ages decided was happening was this: the pope was dispensing merits from a so-called treasury of merits. These merits were the extra good works done by Christ and Mary and the saints, more works than they needed for their own salvation that were now available to other Christians who were in need of these extra merits. And the Pope had the right to dispense from this treasury of merits. If you look at the text of the theses and 56 through 62, this is what Luther has in mind. He keeps talking about the treasuries of the church. And he doesn't specifically mention this treasury of merits, but he does say in 58, for example, "nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints because even apart from the pope, these merits are always working grace in the inner man and working the cross, death, and hell in the outer man. Luther's point being the merits of Christ and the saints are available to Christians, even without the Pope's intervention. But you see there Luther is reacting to the medieval theological justification for these plenary indulgences. The other thing to keep in mind is these plenary indulgences had become much more widely available in the late Middle ages. At the time of the Crusades, they weren't all that common. They became much more common beginning in the year 1300, which was declared a jubilee year by the pope. And so he made these indulgences available to anyone who would go to Rome and purchase one. You may recall that Pope John Paul II declared 2000 a jubilee year, and indulgences were made available in that year, although you no longer have to pay for them, but it's the same idea of a jubilee year and a special indulgence connected with it. So the practice is still very much there, although not in exactly the same way as it was in Luther's day. A lot of things that Luther complained about have been taken out of the system.

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John Tetzel

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Johann-Tetzel>

Johann Tetzel

Dominican friar

Written by: The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica

Johann Tetzel, Tetzel also spelled **Tezel** (born c. 1465, Pirna, Saxony [Germany]—died Aug. 11, 1519, Leipzig), German Dominican friar whose preaching on indulgences, considered by many of his contemporaries to be an abuse of the sacrament of penance, sparked Martin Luther's reaction.



After entering the Dominican order, probably at Leipzig, Tetzel was appointed inquisitor for Poland (1509) and later for Saxony. His experiences as a preacher of indulgences, especially between 1503 and 1510, led to his appointment as general commissioner by Albert, archbishop of Mainz, who, deeply in debt to pay for a large accumulation of benefices, had to contribute a considerable sum toward the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Albert obtained permission from Pope Leo X to conduct the sale of a special plenary indulgence (i.e., remission of the temporal punishment of sin), half of the proceeds of which Albert was to claim to pay the fees of his benefices. In effect, Tetzel became a salesman whose product was to cause a scandal in Germany that evolved into the greatest crisis (the Reformation) in the history of the Western church. Tetzel preached for the indulgence in the German dioceses of Meissen (1516), Magdeburg, and Halberstadt (1517), but he was forbidden to do so in electoral Saxony by the elector Frederick III the Wise of Saxony. Tetzel's preaching at Jüterbog, near Wittenberg, in the spring of 1517 provoked Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses at Wittenberg on Oct. 31, 1517, attacking the system of indulgences. In reply, an uncompromising 50 theses under Tetzel's name (but composed by the theologian

Konrad Wimpina) were published in May 1518. At the end of 1518 Tetzel withdrew to Leipzig priory, where he died.

Tetzel was not a profound theologian and was severely criticized for his unorthodox teaching on indulgences for the dead. His view that gifts secured this indulgence, together with the financial transactions surrounding the preaching of it, was symptomatic of the abuses that provoked the Reformation.

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How Did Luther Come to Preach against Indulgences?

<http://media.ctsfw.edu/Video/ViewDetails/689>.

DAVID: If the whole church was teaching that indulgences were genuine and other theologians defended them, how did Luther come to be so critical of them?

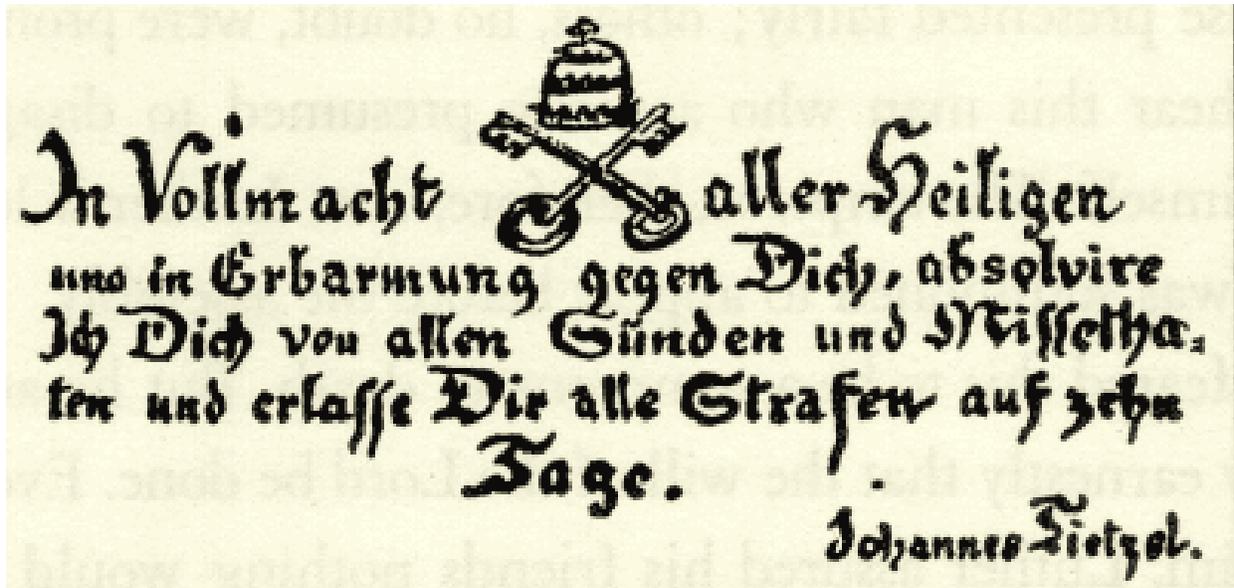
DR. PAUL ROBINSON: Well, David, part of the answer to that is what I've already mentioned in terms of Luther's personal struggle. We use a German term very often to talk about this. We talk about Luther's *Anfechtungen. That just means his deep sorrow over the fact that he couldn't believe God would forgive him. He just didn't trust that God could be gracious enough to just forgive his sins. And because Luther had these doubts, because he doubted that God was that gracious and loving, he simply could not accept the easy solution that indulgences offer. And there were many other people at the time like Luther who simply felt that on one level, things couldn't be that easy, that it wasn't just a matter of paying money for forgiveness or even doing good works to balance off the evil works you had done. On the other hand, Luther discovered that it maybe was even easier than that in a way, that God really does just forgive us. But we'll get to that in another lecture. That's part of the answer. Luther's personal struggle led him to really doubt the solution that indulgences offered. But as far as disagreeing with other theologians, that gets to another issue we need to talk about. And that is a new method of reading the Bible and thinking about theology that Luther got largely from the humanist movement at his time. Now, here we need to be careful when we use this term humanism to understand what exactly we're talking about because you hear a lot today about secular humanism. And that's not what we're talking about in the 16th century. 16th century humanism, Renaissance humanism, is simply a focus on the so-called humane studies. The humanists wanted to reintroduce the study of good Latin and the study of Greek, the study of literature and history and moral philosophy and other topics that had really been neglected in the universities. So as part of that movement and building on that movement, Luther began to read the Bible in the original language of Greek for the New Testament. And he began to think about theology as a matter of what the Bible says based on the original Greek, rather than as a matter of what the theologians said or merely what the church fathers or councils said. So this whole idea of going back to the original text, looking at original languages

and not worrying about what the medieval theologians had to say about it, really opened up Luther's understanding and opened his mind to question what was being taught in indulgences and not simply to point out that the church wasn't even preaching what it officially taught but led him to question the whole foundation of what indulgences were. If you look at the first of the 95 Theses, you have a very good example of the kind of thing Luther learned from his study of the New Testament in Greek. He writes in Thesis 1, "When our lord and master, Jesus Christ, said repent, he called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence." Now, that doesn't sound very radical or even very Greek-based to us until you understand in the footnotes of this edition points this out that Luther is challenging the way the Latin New Testament translated the word repent. Where you have repents in Greek *mettanoyita; in Latin you have *penetentium agite which can be translated repent or do penance. And so Luther begins with this quotation pointing out that the Greek text bears a different meaning from what most people were getting from the Latin translation. So it's not a matter of doing penance. It's not a matter of these penances that indulgences claim to take away. It's a matter of a change of heart and mind in response to Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation in him.

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Image of an Indulgence

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Indulgence.png>



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Heroes and Saints of the Reformation: Frederick the Wise (1463-1525)

<http://reformation500.csl.edu/bio/frederick-the-wise/>



Frederick the Wise

Frederick III of Ernestine Saxony, commonly known as Frederick the Wise, became the first patron of the Protestant Reformation due to his defense of Luther during the early days of the Wittenberg reforms. A known patron of humanist letters and art, especially the work of painters Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach, his founding of the university in Wittenberg provided fertile ground from which the Reformation would grow. His relationship to Luther and Protestant theology, however, remains complex. Very little is known of his motives, politically or religiously, for supporting the reform. Whether out of obligation to a professor at the

university he founded, dynastic rivalry, or sincere religious conviction, Frederick allowed the Protestant movement associated with Luther to gain important momentum during its infancy and sought its political legitimation thereafter.

Born January 17, 1463, Frederick was the first son of the eldest Wettin, Elector Ernest of Saxony. Ernest and his brother, Albert, had in 1485 divided Saxony into two territories, ducal Albertine Saxony and electoral Ernestine Saxony. Receiving an education suitable to the son of a dynastic family, Frederick succeeded his father in 1486, a year after the Leipzig Division of Saxony. Though he had aims of increasing the political and geographical reach of his territory, he was not able to encroach upon either Albertine Saxony, ruled by his cousin George, or the Empire, governed by the Habsburg prince, Maximilian I. The Saxon lands were immensely wealthy due to the silver mines of the Erzgebirge Mountains, but due to their status as a latecomer to the Empire and their location on the fringes of the imperial north, the significance of the territory was limited.

As part of Maximilian's reforms, however, Frederick was appointed president of the Imperial Council (*Reichsregiment*) in 1500.

With the death of Maximilian in January 1519, Frederick found himself in position to exert an authority that would enable the early Protestant movement to make headway. The Saxon elector was considered "imperial vicar," which meant Frederick functionally served as king after the death of Maximilian until a successor was elected. He was also considered a favorite to take the crown. The electors themselves favored Frederick over another of their own, the elector Palatine Louis V. Pope Leo X also preferred the Saxon prince to the Habsburg candidate, Charles V, sending papal chamberlain Karl von Miltitz with the "golden rose" in the hopes that Frederick would accept the crown. Frederick did not want to become emperor, however, and he reached an agreement with Charles V to support the young Habsburg king of Spain—and to impinge upon his fellow electors to do the same—provided that Charles repay an outstanding debt to the Saxons dating to 1497. Rome finally threw its support behind Charles, whom it deemed a lesser evil than Francis I of France. Additionally, Frederick negotiated an unprecedented electoral capitulation to limit Charles's powers.

It was Frederick's support of the Reformation that would become his most enduring contribution. In 1502, the humanist-influenced prince established a new university in Wittenberg to rival the Albertine Saxon university in Leipzig. Through Wittenberg, he became a patron of humanism and other late medieval reforms, including the Augustinian observant movement in Saxony headed by the local prior, Johannes von Staupitz. He named the noted Augustinian theologian Staupitz professor of Bible at Wittenberg soon after its founding, but the steep time demands of a prior and a scholar forced Staupitz to step aside. He chose as his replacement a friar from Erfurt, the young Augustinian Martin Luther. Wittenberg would soon become the center not only of important educational and theological reforms, but ecclesiastical and political reforms that would spread across Western Europe.

The degree of theological support Frederick had for Luther's opinions is uncertain, but he was nonetheless a religious man in his own right. He made pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1493. He was deeply influenced by his own confessor, the Franciscan Jacob Voigt, as well as local Augustinians Johann von Paltz and Staupitz. Frederick also happened to hold one of the largest collections of relics in Europe—19,013 in all—that he continued displaying until 1522, in part because of the profit reaped from pilgrims

traveling to Saxony to see them. Frederick's relationship to Luther remains equally as ambiguous. It is likely that the two never met face to face. They communicated mostly through Georg Spalatin, confidant of Luther and secretary in Frederick's court.

The Saxon prince nonetheless chose to defend Luther and further the cause of reform. When legal proceedings had begun against Luther and the Wittenberg professor was called to Rome, Frederick arranged for an interview at Augsburg with Cardinal Cajetan. During the imperial interregnum, his status as imperial vicar gave the emerging movement a temporary political shield and a propitious window of time to disseminate its ideas free from civil or ecclesiastical recrimination. With the election of Charles in June 1519, and his subsequent coronation in October 1520, Rome was able to proceed against Luther more vigorously. It published the bull threatening Luther's excommunication, *Exurge domine*, in June 1520, and then when Luther failed to recant of his views in Rome sixty days later also excommunicated him with the January 1521 bull, *Decet Romanum pontificem*. As a result, Luther was not permitted to defend his views at the imperial diet that had begun in January of 1521. Frederick again intervened on Luther's behalf, convincing Charles to allow his hearing at Worms in April of that year, then subsequently protecting Luther from reprisal when he staged an attack on the trip back to Wittenberg in order to seclude the reformer at the Wartburg Castle. When Charles did publish the Edict of Worms in May 1521, thereby making Luther an outlaw and proscribing his views in the empire, Frederick obtained an exemption for electoral Saxony that again gave the Protestant Reformation freedom to continue.

Prince Frederick's support for Luther did not necessarily reflect his endorsement of Luther's theological opinions, nor his willingness to practice evangelical religion. Though Luther was critical of the prince's relic collection, Frederick did not cease their display until 1522. Over time, however, Frederick did come to embrace some elements of the Reformation. At the Diet of Nuremberg in 1522, the party from electoral Saxony wore the acronym VDMLÆ (*Verbum Dominum manet in aeternum*) on armbands as a show of support for the reform movement. On his deathbed, Frederick finally received communion in both kinds, another possible sign of his acceptance of the Reformation. He would die on May 5, 1525, in Lochau.

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Top 10 Religious Relics

http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1983194_1983193_1983100,00.html

Shroud of Turin

By Kayla Webley Monday, Apr. 19, 2010



Deloche Lissac / Godong / Corbis

Be it fact or fake, the Shroud of Turin, a yellowed, 14-ft.-long (4.3 m) linen some believe to be Christ's burial cloth, has drawn millions to the Italian city. While the Shroud bears an image of a crucified man with wounds similar to those endured by Jesus, carbon-dating tests in 1988 showed the cloth was made between 1260 and 1390 and therefore could not have been used to wrap Christ's body. Still, the test results have not stopped pilgrims from flocking to take their 3-to-5-minute looks at the shroud this month in its first public viewing since 2000. Some say the tests may have been skewed and should be redone.

Blood of San Gennaro

By Kayla Webley Monday, Apr. 19, 2010



Salvatore Laporta / AP

Each year the people of Naples, Italy, gather on the anniversary of the martyrdom of their patron saint, San Gennaro, to watch a miracle: the liquifying of the saint's dried blood. The miracle occurs like clockwork on Sept. 19, and as many as 18 additional times a year. The fact that the phenomenon has been questioned by scientists has never stopped the celebration. Many believe the so-called miracle of the blood serves to protect the town from harm (such as from the nearby Mount Vesuvius). That belief has been partially

legitimized in years when the blood failed to liquefy and bad things happened — witness 1527's plague, an earthquake in 1980 and even the defeat of the Napoli football (soccer) club.

Muhammad's Beard

By Kayla WebleyMonday, Apr. 19, 2010



Wolfgang Kaehler / Corbis

Said to have been shaved from Muhammad's face by his favorite barber postmortem, the Prophet's beard is on view today in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, Turkey. Though relics have no official sanction in Islam, and the Prophet himself preached against worshipping anyone other than God, many visit the museum's

extensive collection of items — including footprints of the Prophet and other items associated with Muhammad — each year.

Mary's Holy Belt

By Kayla WebleyMonday, Apr. 19, 2010



Grand Tour Collection / Corbis

Mary allegedly handed her hand-woven, camel-hair belt to Thomas the Apostle just before she ascended to heaven. When the belt found its way to Prato, Italy in the 14th century, a special chapel was erected to house it. Today, the belt, called Sacra Cintola, is revered as a relic of the Virgin Mary and is displayed five times a year

(Christmas, Easter, May 1, Aug. 15, and on Mary's birthday, Sept. 8).

John the Baptist's Head

By Kayla Webley Monday, Apr. 19, 2010



KHALED AL-HARIRI / Reuters / Corbis

The final resting place of John the Baptist's head varies widely depending on which religion you subscribe to. Muslims believe his head lies inside the Umayyad Mosque (left) in Damascus, Syria, while Christians believe that a head on display at Rome's Church of San Silvestro in Capite is that of John the Baptist. Still others believe it is

buried in Turkey or even southern France.

Buddha's Tooth

By Kayla Webley Monday, Apr. 19, 2010



Christophe Boisvieux / Corbis

According to Sri Lankan legend, a single tooth remained following Buddha's cremation. His left canine came to be an important possession as it was thought that whoever had the tooth had the divine right to rule. Unsurprisingly the tooth was fought over many times, but today it enjoys a peaceful setting in the Temple of the Tooth in

Kandy, Sri Lanka.

The Tunic of the Blessed Virgin

By Kayla Webley Monday, Apr. 19, 2010



Philippe Giraud / Sygma / Corbis

While France's Chartres Cathedral is one of the nation's finest examples of gothic architecture, that isn't the only reason pilgrims flock there each year. The cathedral is also home to a tunic said to have been worn by the Virgin Mary during the birth of Christ. The tunic, or Sancta Camisia, said to have been given to the church in 876, was

thought to have been destroyed in a fire in 1194. Three days later it was found miraculously unharmed in the treasury, which the bishop claimed was a sign from Mary herself that another, more magnificent, cathedral should be built in its place.

The Grapevine Cross

By Kayla Webley Monday, Apr. 19, 2010



ZURAB KURTSIKIDZE / EPA / Corbis

Legend has it that St. Nino, a Cappadocian woman who preached Christianity in Georgia in the 4th century, was said to have been given the Grapevine Cross — a cross with peculiar drooping arms — by the Virgin Mary herself. Like its original bearer, the cross, now a major symbol of the Georgian Orthodox Church, wandered

several countries before finding its home in the Sioni Cathedral in Tbilisi, Georgia, where it is now displayed.

Footprint of the Prophet Muhammad

By Kayla WebleyMonday, Apr. 19, 2010



Yoray Liberman / Getty Images

Some Muslims believe that wherever the Prophet Muhammad roamed, his left foot made a lasting impression. Such footprints have been recovered from religious sites throughout the Middle East and are now on display at mosques, museums and other historical sites throughout the region. One such print found its way to the Topkapi

Palace Museum in Istanbul, where it is displayed today.

The Chains of St. Peter

By Kayla WebleyMonday, Apr. 19, 2010



Michael S. Yamashita / Corbis

The Apostle Peter was jailed in Jerusalem, shackled in an iron chain for preaching about Jesus. The night before his trial, St. Peter was said to have been released from the chain by an angel and led out of the prison. Today, the chain is housed in a reliquary under the main altar in the San Pietro in Vincoli (Saint Peter in Chains)

basilica in Rome. Legend says that when the Empress Eudoxia gave the chain to Pope Leo I, he held them next to the chains from Peter's first imprisonment in the Mamertime Prison in Rome and the two chains miraculously fused together.

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From St. Peter's Bones to Severed Heads: Christian Relics on Display

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2013/nov/18/st-peters-bones-christian-relics>

From St Peter's bones to severed heads: Christian relics on display

As the Vatican exhibits the bones of St Peter, here are the top 10 extant Christian relics, from holy shroud to sacred head



Dem bones ... a statue of St Peter, Rome. Bones said to be the saint's will be on display at the Vatican.
Photograph: Age Fotostock/Alamy

Once, the western world was full of relics. The bones and skin, fingernails and even heads of saints were preserved, bought and sold, stolen and cherished. Relics of holy people and of Jesus Christ were at the heart of medieval Christianity. Today many relics have been discredited. Museums display empty reliquaries, crafted from gold and silver and laden with jewels – but bereft of the body parts that once gave them meaning.

Still, some relics are still cherished. They have survived sceptics, scientists and in some cases detailed exposure, to be revered as holy objects of awe. As the Vatican puts the bones of St Peter on display, here are the top 10 extant Christian relics, from holy shroud to sacred head.

Holy Shroud of Turin



The Shroud of Turin from a 1979 file photo. Photograph: Barrie M Schwartz/AP

Despite being analyzed by scientists and discredited as a medieval forgery, this centuries-old cloth bearing the image of a man is still seen by many as the burial shroud of Christ. Its modern fame began when a photographer noticed it looks more detailed in negative, implying the image itself is a reversed "negative" imprint of a body, which some see as a bit beyond the capacities of medieval forgers.

Head of St Catherine of Siena



Detail from a painting of Saint Catherine of Siena by Fra Bartolomeo. Photograph: Arte & Immagini srl/Corbis

This has to be the grisliest relic displayed by the Catholic church – a mummified head preserved in the Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico, Siena, and still shown to visitors. Siena is a beautifully preserved medieval city, famous for its annual horse race as well as the art of Duccio, but the head of St Catherine shockingly transports you to what feels like a dark and primitive living past.

Blood of Saint Januarius

Worshippers in Naples gather every September to see a miracle at the southern Italian city's cathedral. The dried blood of St Januarius, martyred in the 4th century AD, is preserved there and has an organic connection with the city's wellbeing. Every September – and on two other days in the year – the red powder liquefies. It becomes living blood – and the city is safe from volcano, earthquake and plague.

The Holy Foreskin



St Anthony of Padua, a patron saint of lost things. By Benozzo Gazzoli. Web image

It is said when the young Jesus Christ was circumcised, his foreskin was preserved. In the middle ages it became a much coveted relic and several churches claimed to own part or all of it. The foreskin was held to have great powers. However, the various relics of it were discredited by the end of the 18th century.

The Tongue of St Anthony of Padua

British Catholics recently gathered at Westminster Cathedral to pay respects to a piece of dried flesh and some facial skin that are said to have belonged to St Anthony of Padua. Seven hundred and fifty years ago the tongue of St Anthony was found to be perfectly preserved – an incorruptible relic. St Anthony was a great preacher, his tongue apparently holy.

The Finger of St Thomas

"Doubting" Thomas was unable to accept the resurrection even though Christ stood there before him. So Christ allowed him to put a suspicious finger inside the wound made in his side by a Roman soldier's lance. It is a moment miraculously painted by Caravaggio. If you doubt the story, you can see Thomas's finger itself, preserved in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome (they've got three pieces of the True Cross, too).

Relics of Sainte-Chapelle



Stained glass windows at Sainte Chapelle church in Paris. Photograph: Pascal DelocheNG/Godong/Corbis

The French king Louis IX – better known as Saint Louis – was so proud of the relics of Christ he bought from Byzantium that he built a splendid church in Paris to house them. Sainte-Chapelle is the world's largest reliquary and one of the most ravishing of all gothic churches. Today the relics, including Christ's Crown of Thorns, are kept in the cathedral of Notre Dame.

Body of St Mark

St Mark was martyred at Alexandria and his body – natch – was miraculously preserved. It was then taken to Venice in one of the greatest relic heists of the middle ages. A gang of daring Venetians stole St Mark's mummified remains and took them to their own city, which identified deeply with St Mark. The mummy is still kept in a tomb in St Mark's Basilica, whose glories celebrate this stolen relic. The theft itself is portrayed in a masterpiece by Tintoretto.

St Cecilia

The perfectly preserved body of this young saint was found in Rome four centuries ago. The discovery was commemorated by a creepily realistic marble sculpture of the corpse by Stefano Maderno. This can be seen at St Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome, which also preserves her relics.

Head of St John the Baptist



Detail from a painting of Herodias with the Head of Saint John the Baptist by Titian. Photograph: George Tatge/Alinari Archives/Corbis

Salome famously asked Herod for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. This most famous of severed heads had a long afterlife as a relic. Amiens Cathedral was built in the middle ages as a shrine for it. A replica of the Baptist's head is still kept there, although the original was stolen in the 19th century.

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Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences

<http://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/ninetyfive.html>

**Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther
on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences
by Dr. Martin Luther (1517)
Published in:**

Works of Martin Luther:

*Adolph Spaeth, L.D. Reed, Henry Eyster Jacobs, et Al., Trans. & Eds.
(Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), Vol.1, pp. 29-38*

Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter.

In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said Poenitentiam agite, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh.
4. The penalty [of sin], therefore, continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.

7. God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring into subjection to His vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to them, nothing should be imposed on the dying.
9. Therefore the Holy Spirit in the pope is kind to us, because in his decrees he always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.
10. Ignorant and wicked are the doings of those priests who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penances for purgatory.
11. This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept.
12. In former times the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties; they are already dead to canonical rules, and have a right to be released from them.
14. The imperfect health [of soul], that is to say, the imperfect love, of the dying brings with it, of necessity, great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear.
15. This fear and horror is sufficient of itself alone (to say nothing of other things) to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.
17. With souls in purgatory it seems necessary that horror should grow less and love increase.
18. It seems unproved, either by reason or Scripture, that they are outside the state of merit, that is to say, of increasing love.
19. Again, it seems unproved that they, or at least that all of them, are certain or assured of their own blessedness, though we may be quite certain of it.
20. Therefore by "full remission of all penalties" the pope means not actually "of all," but only of those imposed by himself.

21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved;
22. Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to the canons, they would have had to pay in this life.
23. If it is at all possible to grant to any one the remission of all penalties whatsoever, it is certain that this remission can be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to the very fewest.
24. It must needs be, therefore, that the greater part of the people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
25. The power which the pope has, in a general way, over purgatory, is just like the power which any bishop or curate has, in a special way, within his own diocese or parish.
26. The pope does well when he grants remission to souls [in purgatory], not by the power of the keys (which he does not possess), but by way of intercession.
27. They preach men who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out [of purgatory].
28. It is certain that when the penny jingles into the money-box, gain and avarice can be increased, but the result of the intercession of the Church is in the power of God alone.
29. Who knows whether all the souls in purgatory wish to be bought out of it, as in the legend of Sts. Severinus and Paschal.
30. No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere; much less that he has attained full remission.
31. Rare as is the man that is truly penitent, so rare is also the man who truly buys indulgences, i.e., such men are most rare.
32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon.
33. Men must be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to Him;

34. For these "graces of pardon" concern only the penalties of sacramental satisfaction, and these are appointed by man.
35. They preach no Christian doctrine who teach that contrition is not necessary in those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessionalia.
36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.
37. Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon.
38. Nevertheless, the remission and participation [in the blessings of the Church] which are granted by the pope are in no way to be despised, for they are, as I have said, the declaration of divine remission.
39. It is most difficult, even for the very keenest theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the abundance of pardons and [the need of] true contrition.
40. True contrition seeks and loves penalties, but liberal pardons only relax penalties and cause them to be hated, or at least, furnish an occasion [for hating them].
41. Apostolic pardons are to be preached with caution, lest the people may falsely think them preferable to other good works of love.
42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend the buying of pardons to be compared in any way to works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons;
44. Because love grows by works of love, and man becomes better; but by pardons man does not grow better, only more free from penalty.
45. 45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.

46. Christians are to be taught that unless they have more than they need, they are bound to keep back what is necessary for their own families, and by no means to squander it on pardons.
47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of pardons is a matter of free will, and not of commandment.
48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting pardons, needs, and therefore desires, their devout prayer for him more than the money they bring.
49. Christians are to be taught that the pope's pardons are useful, if they do not put their trust in them; but altogether harmful, if through them they lose their fear of God.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the pardon-preachers, he would rather that St. Peter's church should go to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that it would be the pope's wish, as it is his duty, to give of his own money to very many of those from whom certain hawkers of pardons cajole money, even though the church of St. Peter might have to be sold.
52. The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it.
53. They are enemies of Christ and of the pope, who bid the Word of God be altogether silent in some Churches, in order that pardons may be preached in others.
54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or a longer time is spent on pardons than on this Word.
55. It must be the intention of the pope that if pardons, which are a very small thing, are celebrated with one bell, with single processions and ceremonies, then the Gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
56. The "treasures of the Church," out of which the pope grants indulgences, are not sufficiently named or known among the people of Christ.

57. That they are not temporal treasures is certainly evident, for many of the vendors do not pour out such treasures so easily, but only gather them.

58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the Saints, for even without the pope, these always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outward man.

59. St. Lawrence said that the treasures of the Church were the Church's poor, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.

60. Without rashness we say that the keys of the Church, given by Christ's merit, are that treasure;

61. For it is clear that for the remission of penalties and of reserved cases, the power of the pope is of itself sufficient.

62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.

63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.

64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.

65. Therefore the treasures of the Gospel are nets with which they formerly were wont to fish for men of riches.

66. The treasures of the indulgences are nets with which they now fish for the riches of men.

67. The indulgences which the preachers cry as the "greatest graces" are known to be truly such, in so far as they promote gain.

68. Yet they are in truth the very smallest graces compared with the grace of God and the piety of the Cross.

69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of apostolic pardons, with all reverence.

70. But still more are they bound to strain all their eyes and attend with all their ears, lest these men preach their own dreams instead of the commission of the pope.

71. He who speaks against the truth of apostolic pardons, let him be anathema and accursed!
72. But he who guards against the lust and license of the pardon-preachers, let him be blessed!
73. The pope justly thunders against those who, by any art, contrive the injury of the traffic in pardons.
74. But much more does he intend to thunder against those who use the pretext of pardons to contrive the injury of holy love and truth.
75. To think the papal pardons so great that they could absolve a man even if he had committed an impossible sin and violated the Mother of God -- this is madness.
76. We say, on the contrary, that the papal pardons are not able to remove the very least of venial sins, so far as its guilt is concerned.
77. It is said that even St. Peter, if he were now Pope, could not bestow greater graces; this is blasphemy against St. Peter and against the pope.
78. We say, on the contrary, that even the present pope, and any pope at all, has greater graces at his disposal; to wit, the Gospel, powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in I. Corinthians xii.
79. To say that the cross, emblazoned with the papal arms, which is set up [by the preachers of indulgences], is of equal worth with the Cross of Christ, is blasphemy.
80. The bishops, curates and theologians who allow such talk to be spread among the people, will have an account to render.
81. This unbridled preaching of pardons makes it no easy matter, even for learned men, to rescue the reverence due to the pope from slander, or even from the shrewd questionings of the laity.
82. To wit: -- "Why does not the pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a Church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial."

83. Again: -- "Why are mortuary and anniversary masses for the dead continued, and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded on their behalf, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"

84. Again: -- "What is this new piety of God and the pope, that for money they allow a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God, and do not rather, because of that pious and beloved soul's own need, free it for pure love's sake?"

85. Again: -- "Why are the penitential canons long since in actual fact and through disuse abrogated and dead, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences, as though they were still alive and in force?"

86. Again: -- "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is to-day greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?"

87. Again: -- "What is it that the pope remits, and what participation does he grant to those who, by perfect contrition, have a right to full remission and participation?"

88. Again: -- "What greater blessing could come to the Church than if the pope were to do a hundred times a day what he now does once, and bestow on every believer these remissions and participations?"

89. "Since the pope, by his pardons, seeks the salvation of souls rather than money, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons granted heretofore, since these have equal efficacy?"

90. To repress these arguments and scruples of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the Church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies, and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, pardons were preached according to the spirit and mind of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved; nay, they would not exist.

92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace!

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross!

94. Christians are to be exhorted that they be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hell;

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven rather through many tribulations, than through the assurance of peace.

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Blest Halloween!

<http://blogs.lcms.org/2009/blest-halloween-10-2009>

Blest Halloween!

on October 2, 2009 in CLASSIC WITNESS, LUTHERAN WITNESS

It was no coincidence that Martin Luther chose Oct. 31 as the day to nail his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

by Rev. Mark Loest

For most people, October means cooler weather, raking leaves, and, at the end of the month, celebrating Halloween. For Lutherans, October includes the commemoration of Reformation Day—the day Martin Luther is said to have nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

It may seem strange that a day so preoccupied with the devil and death is also Reformation Day. But Luther chose this date with a purpose. His theses (academic statements for discussion and debate) were on the topic of indulgences, and Luther chose the eve of All Saints Day—when the church commemorates the faithful departed—as the date to make them public.

Penance and Indulgences

By the time they are confirmed, Lutherans know that the public outcry that fueled the Reformation of the church started with Luther's posting of the 95 Theses. They also know that Luther's theses had to do with the selling of indulgences. However, today's Lutherans do not always understand exactly what indulgences are and why Luther protested their sale.

Indulgences have to do with the Roman Catholic Church's practice surrounding the Sacrament of Penance that developed during the Middle Ages. Penance is the fourth of the seven Roman Catholic sacraments.

Basically, sinners, fallen from the grace they originally received in Baptism, may, by God's moving and by certain acts (contrition, confession, and satisfaction), recover the lost grace. Sinners are absolved only after displaying sorrow through prescribed acts of penance, such as praying, taking a pilgrimage, or giving alms. In other words, doing works, as well as having faith in the mercy of God, are necessary for full forgiveness.

But what especially alarmed Luther were the outright payments in connection with indulgences.

For money (and sometimes even goods like fowl and dairy products), a person could buy an indulgence that claimed to offer the merits of the saints—and even of Christ—on behalf of the owner, and, in that way, sins were forgiven and a place was secured in heaven.

Defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, an indulgence is “the remissions before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.”

According to the Catholic teaching, indulgences offer forgiveness for the penalties that come with sin, even though Christ paid for those sins. A Christian can acquire an indulgence in a number of ways through the Church, which has authority over the “treasury” of Christ and the saints. In other words, indulgences either transfer or reduce penitential acts and punishment for sin. An indulgence is considered partial if it removes part of the temporal punishment due to sin and plenary if it removes all punishment.

Indulgences have been around for about one thousand years. In 1096, Pope Urban II offered plenary (meaning complete) indulgences in connection with the first crusade.

The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224-74) fully developed indulgence theory, allowing for the possibility of indulgences to be applied to souls in purgatory. For the sinner who does not make complete satisfaction in this life, there is purgatory—an intermediate state between heaven and hell. The soul that departs this life and is not immediately judged to heaven or hell is purified for a time in purgatory until released to heaven.

The result was that by the time of Luther, Christians cared more about avoiding purgatory than living and dying a Christian life and death. And indulgence claims were inflated beyond the original idea of release simply from temporal punishment imposed by a priest.

In 1530, the Augsburg Confession rejected the medieval errors concerning penance by declaring: “Rejected ... are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfaction made by man” (Augsburg Confession, Article XII, page 35–Tappert).

95 Theses

Martin Luther (born Nov. 10, 1483), was the son of Hans Luder, a mine and foundry owner in Mansfeld, Germany. He originally began his studies to become a lawyer, but in July 1505, everything changed when during a terrible thunderstorm—and fearing for his life—he promised St. Anna that if she would spare his life he would become a monk.

Luther survived the storm and kept his promise, promptly quitting his university studies and joining the Augustinians in Erfurt. Taking his vows seriously, he soon experienced great spiritual conflicts over the forgiveness-of-sins-through-good-works system of monastery, which he came to realize was a completely inadequate way to be forgiven. In order to save the young monk from spiritual ruin, his superior, Johann Staupitz, directed Brother Martin to Scripture.

Luther began his studies again—only this time in biblical theology. By 1508, he was lecturing. In 1512, he earned his doctorate. Upon completing a trip to Rome (from the fall of 1510 until the spring of 1511), Luther may well have begun to question the medieval penitential system, especially in light of what he saw in the “holy” city, but he said nothing publicly at the moment. More would happen to shape his insights.

At the same time, Luther was transferred permanently to Wittenberg, to eventually take the place of Father Staupitz as professor of biblical theology. It was in Scripture that he was to find the answers that troubled his soul.

Luther describes what happened at Wittenberg: “At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.””

“There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is revealed by the Gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 34, page 337—Concordia Publishing House).

It was as a preacher, rather than professor, that Luther encountered the abuses of indulgences. Against the wishes of Luther’s prince, Frederick the Wise of electoral Saxony, indulgences were hawked to the people of his land, albeit in neighboring ducal Saxony. They needed only to cross the border to purchase them. To make matters worse, the indulgence-salesman and friar John Tetzel told Luther’s parishioners they could even purchase indulgences from him for sins they had not yet committed.

It was no coincidence that Martin Luther chose what we know as Halloween as the day to put forth his 95 Theses, mailing them to the archbishop in charge so something might be done, and, as the story goes, nailing them to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. In Wittenberg, Luther’s own prince offered the pious the opportunity of indulgence through his enormous collection of relics in the Castle Church on the Day of All Saints, Nov. 1.

Luther took advantage of the occasion. Luther himself never told the story, but after his death, co-worker Philipp Melancthon described the scene.

On the Eve of All Saints, Oct. 31, 1517, Luther posted on the door of the Castle Church (in a manner customary at the university) the 95 Theses, which called into question and for discussion the abuses associated with indulgences.

The posting of the theses became the spark that ignited the Reformation.

A poem written long ago to commemorate the Reformation praises Halloween with the words:

*Blest Halloween that struck the hour
When Luther’s hammer rose and fell
At Wittenberg in heaven-born power
And rang dark popery’s funeral-knell,
When long and cruel night was gone
And smiling rose the promised dawn!*

Rev. Mark A. Loest is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Frankentrost, Saginaw, Mich. This story appeared originally in the October 2001 Lutheran Witness.

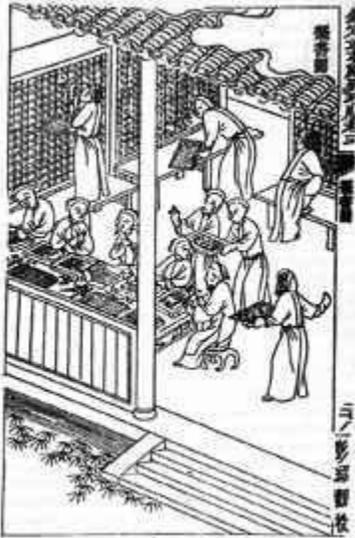
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Gutenberg's Invention

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Gutenberg's Invention

Early Chinese printing



A Chinese person would be surprised to hear that Johannes Gutenberg in Germany invented printing approximately 550 years ago. Actually, the art of printing is much older. It was first developed in Eastern Asia, and centuries before Gutenberg's birth around 1400 the Chinese knew the system of "movable characters". Characters on bones, bronze, ceramic and stone slabs give evidence of the use of writing in China already in the 5th millenium before Christ. Writing became reproducible in larger quantities when the Chinese succeeded in inventing paper approximately 2,200 years ago. In the beginning paper consisted largely of hemp fibers, then of silk rags or mulberry bark and similarly exotic raw materials. But it worked: Suddenly large writing surfaces were available that could be easily produced.

Soon the question of reproducing the characters also arose. Chinese abrasions and simple printing of stone inscriptions on paper are considered to be early forms of printing. They enabled a direct spreading of texts. In the 2nd century AD, at about the same time when in the western world the Roman emperor Marc Aurel recorded his philosophical thought on papyrus roles and for the duplication was dependent on scribes, in China since the year 175 of our time calculation the main works of the classical Chinese literature were cut in stone slabs. Thousands of copies were made by simple printing: Moistened paper was pressed onto the inscription stones, and when brushing the paper with ink the cut characters stood out white against the blackened paper. The next level was the so-called woodblock printing in the 7th Century: Each character was cut in reverse into a piece of wood by removing all surrounding wood. These raised lines were dyed and abraded on paper, thus producing a positive print of the desired text.

This method remained over centuries the primary means for printing religious and everyday books, for playing cards, calendars, paper money and pictures in China. The sophisticated Chinese administrative and education system of the Song dynasty (960 - 1269) caused a printing boom. Thus, encyclopedias, manuals and literature collections of all kinds were produced. The method of printing from wood was used in China until the end of the 19th century. But

around 1040, when in Europe William the Conqueror still spent his childhood days in Normandy, a Chinese called Bi Sheng already experimented with movable, individual printing types made of ceramic. He arranged them on an iron plate as whole texts and fixed them with a layer of wax and resin. These were then printed. If the characters were to be used again, one heated the iron plate until melting wax and resin released the forms again. 300 years later the first wooden characters appeared.

From there it was only a small step to manufacture the individual wood characters in uniform size to be able to always assemble them in standardized blocks. Soon successful experiments were carried out with characters of copper, lead or brass. But printing with movable characters never really established itself in China until the end of the last century. The reason was obvious: While traditional printing with whole wooden plates required enormous storage space, the thousands and thousands of Chinese characters prevented a simple and above all fast composition of printing plates from movable letters.

In comparison it was much simpler for Gutenberg, with 26 characters and a handful of auxiliary characters to set all words! In Asia only the Koreans reached the crucial step. They developed an alphabetical script called "Han'gul", almost at the time of Gutenberg's invention in Germany. This script consisted initially of 28, and later 24 characters and was presented officially in Korea in the year 1444 - almost at the same time (i.e. from 1452 to 1455) that Gutenberg printed his famous bible in Mainz.

The invention

The printing trade was well established even before Gutenberg's time, using woodblock technology. A sheet of paper was placed on the inked woodblock and an impression taken by rubbing - a complex and time-consuming procedure.

The genius of Gutenberg's invention was to split the text into its individual components, such as lower and upper case letters, punctuation marks, ligatures and abbreviations, drawing on the traditions of medieval scribes. These individual items were then cast in quantity as mirror images and assembled to form words, lines and pages.

The master for each letter was cut into the face of a steel block, resulting in a precise relief in reverse – the punch.

The next step was to create a matrix by placing the punch on a rectangular block made of a softer metal – usually copper - and striking it vertically with a hammer-blow.

The resulting matrix was reworked and straightened to form a right-angled cube. This true-reading image required a uniform depth, achieved by filing over the

surface. Gutenberg developed a hand casting instrument to facilitate the casting of a character, with two sections enclosing a rectangular casting channel, closed at one end by the matrix. The resulting character was then de-flashed, to remove excess casting material.



Each letter had a pre-determined breaking point to ensure that all letters were of identical height.

The hand casting instrument - the most significant element of the invention - allowed the printer to quickly cast the required number of a diverse range of characters. The metal used for casting was an alloy of lead, tin and further admixtures, with attributes that ensured rapid cooling and sufficient durability under the high mechanical stresses of the press.

The printing press was a screw press, specially designed to achieve an effective and even transfer of the image to paper or even parchment – a quantum leap in speed and efficiency compared with the previous method of taking impressions by rubbing.



Translation: John Burland

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“How Luther Went Viral”

<http://www.economist.com/node/21541719>

Social media in the 16th Century

How Luther went viral

Five centuries before Facebook and the Arab spring, social media helped bring about the Reformation

Dec 17th 2011

IT IS a familiar-sounding tale: after decades of simmering discontent a new form of media gives opponents of an authoritarian regime a way to express their views, register their solidarity and co-ordinate their actions. The protesters' message spreads virally through social networks, making it impossible to suppress and highlighting the extent of public support for revolution. The combination of improved publishing technology and social networks is a catalyst for social change where previous efforts had failed. That's what happened in the Arab spring. It's also what happened during the Reformation, nearly 500 years ago, when Martin Luther and his allies took the new media of their day—pamphlets, ballads and woodcuts—and circulated them through social networks to promote their message of religious reform.

Scholars have long debated the relative importance of printed media, oral transmission and images in rallying popular support for the Reformation. Some have championed the central role of printing, a relatively new technology at the time. Opponents of this view emphasise the importance of preaching and other forms of oral transmission. More recently historians have highlighted the role of media as a means of social signalling and co-ordinating public opinion in the Reformation.

Now the internet offers a new perspective on this long-running debate, namely that the important factor was not the printing press itself (which had been around since the 1450s), but the wider system of media sharing along social networks—what is called “social media” today. Luther, like the Arab revolutionaries, grasped the dynamics of this new media environment very quickly, and saw how it could spread his message.

New post from Martin Luther

The start of the Reformation is usually dated to Luther's nailing of his “95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31st 1517. The “95 Theses” were propositions written in Latin that he wished to discuss, in the academic custom of the day, in an open debate at the university. Luther, then an obscure theologian and minister, was outraged by the behaviour of Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar who was selling indulgences to raise money to fund the pet project of his boss, Pope Leo X: the reconstruction of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. Hand over your

money, went Tetzels sales pitch, and you can ensure that your dead relatives are not stuck in purgatory. This crude commercialisation of the doctrine of indulgences, encapsulated in Tetzels slogan—"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, so the soul from purgatory springs"—was, to Luther, "the pious defrauding of the faithful" and a glaring symptom of the need for broad reform. Pinning a list of propositions to the church door, which doubled as the university notice board, was a standard way to announce a public debate.

Although they were written in Latin, the "95 Theses" caused an immediate stir, first within academic circles in Wittenberg and then farther afield. In December 1517 printed editions of the theses, in the form of pamphlets and broadsheets, appeared simultaneously in Leipzig, Nuremberg and Basel, paid for by Luther's friends to whom he had sent copies. German translations, which could be read by a wider public than Latin-speaking academics and clergy, soon followed and quickly spread throughout the German-speaking lands. Luther's friend Friedrich Myconius later wrote that "hardly 14 days had passed when these propositions were known throughout Germany and within four weeks almost all of Christendom was familiar with them."

The unintentional but rapid spread of the "95 Theses" alerted Luther to the way in which media passed from one person to another could quickly reach a wide audience. "They are printed and circulated far beyond my expectation," he wrote in March 1518 to a publisher in Nuremberg who had published a German translation of the theses. But writing in scholarly Latin and then translating it into German was not the best way to address the wider public. Luther wrote that he "should have spoken far differently and more distinctly had I known what was going to happen." For the publication later that month of his "Sermon on Indulgences and Grace", he switched to German, avoiding regional vocabulary to ensure that his words were intelligible from the Rhineland to Saxony. The pamphlet, an instant hit, is regarded by many as the true starting point of the Reformation.



AFP/corbis Mubarak and Leo X, the anciens régimes

The media environment that Luther had shown himself so adept at managing had much in common with today's online ecosystem of blogs, social networks and discussion threads. It was a decentralised system whose participants took care of distribution, deciding collectively which messages to amplify through sharing and recommendation. Modern media theorists refer to participants in such systems as a "networked public", rather than an "audience", since they do more than just consume information. Luther would pass the text of a new pamphlet to a friendly printer (no money changed hands) and then wait for it to ripple through the network of printing centres across Germany.

Unlike larger books, which took weeks or months to produce, a pamphlet could be printed in a day or two. Copies of the initial edition, which cost about the same as a chicken, would first spread throughout the town where it was printed. Luther's sympathisers recommended it to their friends. Booksellers promoted it and itinerant colporteurs hawked it. Travelling merchants, traders and preachers would then carry copies to other towns, and if they sparked sufficient interest, local printers would quickly produce their own editions, in batches of 1,000 or so, in the hope of cashing in on the buzz. A popular pamphlet would thus spread quickly without its author's involvement.

As with "Likes" and retweets today, the number of reprints serves as an indicator of a given item's popularity. Luther's pamphlets were the most sought after; a contemporary remarked that they "were not so much sold as seized". His first pamphlet written in German, the "Sermon on Indulgences and Grace", was reprinted 14 times in 1518 alone, in print runs of at least 1,000 copies each time. Of the 6,000 different pamphlets that were published in German-speaking lands between 1520 and 1526, some 1,700 were editions of a few dozen works by Luther. In all, some 6m-7m pamphlets were printed in the first decade of the Reformation, more than a quarter of them Luther's.

Although Luther was the most prolific and popular author, there were many others on both sides of the debate. Tetzl, the indulgence-seller, was one of the first to respond to him in print, firing back with his own collection of theses. Others embraced the new pamphlet format to weigh in on the merits of Luther's arguments, both for and against, like argumentative bloggers. Sylvester Mazzolini defended the pope against Luther in his "Dialogue Against the Presumptuous Theses of Martin Luther". He called Luther "a leper with a brain of brass and a nose of iron" and dismissed his arguments on the basis of papal infallibility. Luther, who refused to let any challenge go unanswered, took a mere two days to produce his own pamphlet in response, giving as good as he got. "I am sorry now that I despised Tetzl," he wrote. "Ridiculous as he was, he was more acute than you. You cite no scripture. You give no reasons."

Being able to follow and discuss such back-and-forth exchanges of views, in which each author quoted his opponent's words in order to dispute them, gave people a thrilling and unprecedented sense of participation in a vast, distributed debate. Arguments in their own social circles about the merits of Luther's views could be seen as part of a far wider discourse, both spoken and printed. Many pamphlets called upon the reader to discuss their contents with others and read them aloud to the illiterate. People read and discussed pamphlets at home with their families, in groups with their friends, and in inns

and taverns. Luther's pamphlets were read out at spinning bees in Saxony and in bakeries in Tyrol. In some cases entire guilds of weavers or leather-workers in particular towns declared themselves supporters of the Reformation, indicating that Luther's ideas were being propagated in the workplace. One observer remarked in 1523 that better sermons could be heard in the inns of Ulm than in its churches, and in Basel in 1524 there were complaints about people preaching from books and pamphlets in the town's taverns. Contributors to the debate ranged from the English king Henry VIII, whose treatise attacking Luther (co-written with Thomas More) earned him the title "Defender of the Faith" from the pope, to Hans Sachs, a shoemaker from Nuremberg who wrote a series of hugely popular songs in support of Luther.

A multimedia campaign

It was not just words that travelled along the social networks of the Reformation era, but music and images too. The news ballad, like the pamphlet, was a relatively new form of media. It set a poetic and often exaggerated description of contemporary events to a familiar tune so that it could be easily learned, sung and taught to others. News ballads were often "contrafacta" that deliberately mashed up a pious melody with secular or even profane lyrics. They were distributed in the form of printed lyric sheets, with a note to indicate which tune they should be sung to. Once learned they could spread even among the illiterate through the practice of communal singing.

Both reformers and Catholics used this new form to spread information and attack their enemies. "We are Starting to Sing a New Song", Luther's first venture into the news-ballad genre, told the story of two monks who had been executed in Brussels in 1523 after refusing to recant their Lutheran beliefs. Luther's enemies denounced him as the Antichrist in song, while his supporters did the same for the pope and insulted Catholic theologians ("Goat, desist with your bleating", one of them was admonished). Luther himself is thought to have been the author of "Now We Drive Out the Pope", a parody of a folk song called "Now We Drive Out Winter", whose tune it borrowed:

*"Now we drive out the pope
from Christ's church and God's house.
Therein he has reigned in a deadly fashion
and has seduced uncountably many souls.
Now move along, you damned son,
you Whore of Babylon. You are the abomination and the Antichrist,
full of lies, death and cunning."*

Woodcuts were another form of propaganda. The combination of bold graphics with a smattering of text, printed as a broadsheet, could convey messages to the illiterate or semi-literate and serve as a visual aid for preachers. Luther remarked that "without images we can neither think nor understand anything." Some religious woodcuts were elaborate, with complex allusions and layers of meaning that would only have been apparent to the well-educated. "Passional Christi und Antichristi", for example, was a series of images contrasting the piety of Christ with the decadence and corruption of the

pope. Some were astonishingly crude and graphic, such as “The Origin of the Monks” (see picture), showing three devils excreting a pile of monks. The best of them were produced by Luther's friend Lucas Cranach. Luther's opponents responded with woodcuts of their own: “Luther's Game of Heresy” (see beginning of this article) depicts him boiling up a stew with the help of three devils, producing fumes from the pot labelled falsehood, pride, envy, heresy and so forth.

Amid the barrage of pamphlets, ballads and woodcuts, public opinion was clearly moving in Luther's favour. “Idle chatter and inappropriate books” were corrupting the people, fretted one bishop. “Daily there is a veritable downpour of Lutheran tracts in German and Latin...nothing is sold here except the tracts of Luther,” lamented Aleander, Leo X's envoy to Germany, in 1521. Most of the 60 or so clerics who rallied to the pope's defence did so in academic and impenetrable Latin, the traditional language of theology, rather than in German. Where Luther's works spread like wildfire, their pamphlets fizzled. Attempts at censorship failed, too. Printers in Leipzig were banned from publishing or selling anything by Luther or his allies, but material printed elsewhere still flowed into the city. The city council complained to the Duke of Saxony that printers faced losing “house, home, and all their livelihood” because “that which one would gladly sell, and for which there is demand, they are not allowed to have or sell.” What they had was lots of Catholic pamphlets, “but what they have in over-abundance is desired by no one and cannot even be given away.”

Luther's enemies likened the spread of his ideas to a sickness. The papal bull threatening Luther with excommunication in 1520 said its aim was “to cut off the advance of this plague and cancerous disease so it will not spread any further”. The Edict of Worms in 1521 warned that the spread of Luther's message had to be prevented, otherwise “the whole German nation, and later all other nations, will be infected by this same disorder.” But it was too late—the infection had taken hold in Germany and beyond. To use the modern idiom, Luther's message had gone viral.

From Wittenberg to Facebook

In the early years of the Reformation expressing support for Luther's views, through preaching, recommending a pamphlet or singing a news ballad directed at the pope, was dangerous. By stamping out isolated outbreaks of opposition swiftly, autocratic regimes discourage their opponents from speaking out and linking up. A collective-action problem thus arises when people are dissatisfied, but are unsure how widely their dissatisfaction is shared, as Zeynep Tufekci, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, has observed in connection with the Arab spring. The dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia, she argues, survived for as long as they did because although many people deeply disliked those regimes, they could not be sure others felt the same way. Amid the outbreaks of unrest in early 2011, however, social-media websites enabled lots of people to signal their preferences en masse to their peers very quickly, in an “informational cascade” that created momentum for further action.



Where monks came from, in the Lutherans' view

The same thing happened in the Reformation. The surge in the popularity of pamphlets in 1523-24, the vast majority of them in favour of reform, served as a collective signalling mechanism. As Andrew Pettegree, an expert on the Reformation at St Andrew's University, puts it in "Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion", "It was the superabundance, the cascade of titles that created the impression of an overwhelming tide, an unstoppable movement of opinion...Pamphlets and their purchasers had together created the impression of irresistible force." Although Luther had been declared a heretic in 1521, and owning or reading his works was banned by the church, the extent of local political and popular support for Luther meant he escaped execution and the Reformation became established in much of Germany.

Modern society tends to regard itself as somehow better than previous ones, and technological advance reinforces that sense of superiority. But history teaches us that there is nothing new under the sun. Robert Darnton, an historian at Harvard University, who has studied information-sharing networks in pre-revolutionary France, argues that "the marvels of communication technology in the present have produced a false consciousness about the past—even a sense that communication has no history, or had nothing of importance to consider before the days of television and the internet." Social media are not unprecedented: rather, they are the continuation of a long tradition. Modern digital networks may be able to do it more quickly, but even 500 years ago the sharing of media could play a supporting role in precipitating a revolution. Today's social-media systems do not just connect us to each other: they also link us to the past.

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What a Difference a Half Millennium Makes!

<http://blogs.lcms.org/2010/what-a-difference-a-half-millennium-makes-10-2010>

What a Difference a Half Millennium Makes!

on October 5, 2010 in FEATURE, LUTHERAN WITNESS

by Dr. Robert Kolb

People around the world are beginning to get ready to celebrate! To celebrate what? The 500th anniversary of Luther's posting of 95 theses on indulgences, even though many of them do not know what the theses were or what purposes indulgences served.

Whether they know much about Luther or not, many—within Lutheran churches, within other Christian churches, and outside the church completely—do know that Luther's theses launched a reform movement. At the same time, he set in motion a cultural revolution.

In addition to refocusing the entire understanding of how Christianity functions as a religion, Luther inaugurated the first mass media event in history. He did so quite unawares. For a small circle of friends, he prepared his theses—academic proposals for debate—on indulgences, which were grants from temporal punishment from the pope after guilt before God had been absolved. Luther only wanted to explore the practice of selling these indulgences. Pope Leo X had commissioned their sale in Germany to aid Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz in paying off his debts—incurred in attaining his third high office in the church—and to support the building of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Printers saw a market for such theses, however, much broader than Luther's little circle of conversation partners. He was touching a raw nerve in a populace in the midst of a crisis of pastoral care. As a teacher of the Bible and an Augustinian monk, Luther burned with concern for the peace the indulgence system robbed from those who should be trusting in Christ and hearkening to His Word. The printers used Luther's bait for debate and Johann Gutenberg's relatively new medium to carry out an innovation in how ideas could be spread to a wide public across German-speaking lands and beyond.

That is something worth celebrating. Lutherans have celebrated Oct. 31 to remember that Luther inaugurated a revolution in the way in which western Christians perceived their faith. He had grown up with a ritual-based religion that gave the human creature ways of performing sacred works to please the Creator. He defined the Christian faith as a perception of reality based on the Creator's longing to converse and commune with His human creatures. Luther centered his life, his trust, on God come in human flesh as Jesus Christ to restore sinners to that conversation and community by dying and rising.

Other Christians have celebrated that as well, sometimes through different lenses than Lutherans use. People outside the Church have found in Luther—with good grounding and sometimes not so good grounding—the symbol of a new way of using language and communicating, or a herald of human freedom and human rights, but also the initiator of error, political abuse of power, or racist cruelty.

REMEMBERING THE DAY

In the sixteenth century, some Lutherans did stop to remember the Wittenberg Reformer, more often on his birthday and death day than on Oct. 31. On the 100th anniversary of the posting of the 95 Theses, Calvinists took the lead in celebrating Luther's bold move. Threatening war clouds hung over Germany in 1555 as Roman Catholic officials maneuvered to reverse the tolerance granted to adherents of the Augsburg Confession by the Religious Peace of Augsburg. Lutheran princes, for the most part, exerted their best efforts to find compromise with the dedicated Roman Catholic Habsburg emperors. Calvinist princes, especially Frederick V of the Palatinate, took the lead in actively preparing for what he regarded as inevitable conflict. Rallying support across the Protestant landscape by celebrating the beginning of the Reformation seemed appropriate, politically as well as piously, at the moment. Lutherans slowly joined the planning.

Lutherans and other Christians did observe subsequent centennials when a so-called 17 year came around. In the nineteenth century, Klaus Harms—a professor in Kiel, Germany—used the occasion to issue 95 new theses, calling for a return to Reformation faith in the face of the rationalism of the Enlightenment. At the same time, the Calvinist king of Prussia, Frederick William III, used the event to initiate efforts to bring the Lutheran majority of his lands together in a union with his Calvinist fellow believers. In 1917, the Western world was at war; Germany and all things German stood in discredit in much of Europe and North America.

Luther took further buffeting in the following years because some associated his anti-Jewish remarks with National Socialist anti-Semitism. As unfortunate as those remarks were—The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod repudiated them in convention in 1983—the association of his religiously and exegetically based criticism with the blood-and soil-related racism that arose in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century is anachronistic and irresponsible.

A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE

What will happen in 2017? Critics are already sharpening their knives. A self-designated Anabaptist announces on the Internet, “Martin Luther was not a great reformer like [sic!] the history books teach, but he was a fraud” and “deranged.” Rumors circulate that Roman Catholic critics will dredge up again a rather recent fabrication of a murder charge against Luther, which he avoided by fleeing into the monastery. In fact, Luther's sixteenth-century opponents pioneered analysis of his life. The first biography of the

Wittenberg Reformer flowed from the pen of his foe, Johannes Cochlaeus. In 1549, he published his *Commentaries on the Deeds and Writings of Martin Luther*, labeling Luther an “enraged hornet,” a “triple-jawed Cerberus,” and a “disgraced, infamous, and damned heretic.” Cochlaeus invented some stories that cannot be documented elsewhere . . . but not a murder.

Luther scholar Christopher Boyd Brown of the Boston University School of Theology points out that Luther did indeed say, “By the singular plan of God I became a monk, so that they would not capture me . . . because the entire [Augustinian] Order took care of me” (Table Talk, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*[Weimar 1912], 1:134), in reference to his protection in the church-political maneuvering following 1517. The papal party wanted to burn him at the stake, and his Augustinian superiors and brothers shielded him. The murder charge cannot be documented from reliable historical sources.

Against such allegations, what should Lutherans do as they prepare for 2017? One answer may be, “Not much.” Luther has survived Johannes Cochlaeus and countless other detractors and misinterpreters of good will. He remained in 2000, according to *Life* magazine, the third most important person of the past millennium. He will survive as a voice of Christ’s Gospel in the twenty-first century as well.

Nonetheless, Lutherans in North America should prepare, individually and in their congregations, for a celebration that serves the Gospel. Serving or glorifying Luther is no proper goal. He wished to fade into the woodwork so that the biblical message of new life in Christ could be broadcast. Proper preparation for celebrating the posting of the Ninety-five Theses should begin with individual reading and discussion to inform ourselves of just what it is that has made Luther a special person in western history, especially the history of the Church.

A HOST OF RESOURCES

Between 1958 and 1986, CPH and Fortress Press issued 54 volumes of Luther’s writings in translation. Currently, CPH is translating 12 more volumes under the editorship of Professor Brown. In addition, studies of aspects of Luther’s thought and life can enrich our understanding of what he taught and what his insights into Scripture mean for twenty-first-century people in our own circumstances and environments.

Congregations should, at the same time, place key resources for learning more about Luther and how his proclamation of the Gospel may be translated into our world in their libraries and urge members to read and digest them. To that end, congregational discussion groups will be of great help. Such groups can profit not only from printed materials but various other resources, including the several films presenting Luther’s life, produced during the past 60 years. Electronic materials also can encourage our

deepening understanding of our own heritage and why it should be shared with other Christians and those outside the faith at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Despite the fact that Luther's world differs in many significant ways from ours—the computer has replaced the printing press; democratic forms of government the monarchy; modern capitalistic practices the partly feudal, partly capitalistic forms of economic exchange Luther experienced—our contemporaries face their own sin and other forms of evil around them. God continues to put His Church to work in bringing the life-giving message of forgiveness and salvation in the Crucified and Risen One to those around us. Luther is not the point and will not be in 2017, but his insights in the Word of life in Scripture can improve our own witness and sharpen our own skills at delivering life and salvation to those around us.

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