

Name

Period

Date

CHAPTER 14 | LESSON 1 Trouble for the Catholic Church

Martin Luther: Church Reformer

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a Catholic monk and priest who questioned the authority of the Pope. The issues he raised led to the establishment of Protestant churches during a movement called the Reformation.

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Saxony. His father, Hans, was a freeholder and a miner. Martin graduated from the University of Erfurt in 1505. He followed his father's wishes and began studying to become a lawyer.

After a short time, however, Martin stopped his law studies and entered a monastery. Luther said this sudden change was the result of being caught out in a violent thunderstorm. He was badly frightened by a bolt of lightning and promised God that he would give up his worldly life. Luther then joined the Agustin religious order.

Biblical Scholar Luther was a devoted monk. He began studying the Scriptures and soon became a priest. In 1508, the Agustin order sent Martin to the University of Wittenberg. He began preparing for a doctorate in theology, or religious studies. Before graduating, Luther was sent on Church business to Rome. There he was shocked by the lack of concern many Church officials showed for spiritual matters.

After receiving his doctorate in theology, Luther began teaching Biblical literature at the University of Wittenberg. As Luther studied the Bible, he sometimes came up with more questions than answers. His search for peace of mind led him to discover, in the New Testament, the importance of faith. In Luther's introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, he defined faith as "God's work in us." He went on to say that "faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace Because of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, and love and praise the God who has shown you such grace." According to Luther, faith in God automatically leads people to do good.



Catholic Reformer Luther's personal insights regarding faith led to his activism within the Catholic Church. He began speaking out against Church practices that he believed were wrong. One such practice was the sale of indulgences. An indulgence entitled the purchaser to the forgiveness of sins. Luther was not the first to object to this practice. However, the sale of indulgences continued because it was a good moneymaker. When Pope Leo X began issuing indulgences to finance St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Luther went so far as to object in writing. He made a list of Church practices, including the sale of indulgences, that he felt were wrong. Then he posted the list, known as the Ninety-Five Theses, on the door of a church. Word of Luther's protest quickly spread. His theses were copied and debated throughout Germany. Pope Leo responded by demanding that the head of Luther's order keep him under control. Luther also was told to withdraw his criticisms. He agreed to do so only if he could be shown in the Bible why he was wrong.

CHAPTER 14



Name	Period	Date
------	--------	------

HISTORY MAKERS: MARTIN LUTHER CONTINUED

Luther continued his attempts at reform. In 1520, he wrote *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. He maintained that the Pope was not entitled to authority over heads of state. He urged German princes to join in reforming the Church. In *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther wrote that Christians have the right to a direct relationship with God. This denied the Pope’s role as intermediary between an individual and God. Luther’s *The Freedom of a Christian Man* restated the author’s belief that faith and proper conduct were the true marks of a Christian. In 1521, Pope Leo X formally excommunicated Martin Luther. This meant that Luther was no longer a Catholic. Luther responded by publicly burning the Pope’s proclamation.

Pope Leo X was not finished with Luther. He persuaded Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to call Luther before his imperial diet, or assembly, at Worms. Luther was again told to withdraw his criticism of the Church. Luther refused, saying that he had to stand by his beliefs. The diet then declared him to be an outlaw and called for him to be seized. Luther managed to escape with the help of his friends. Frederick III of Saxony provided Martin with refuge in the Wartburg, his castle. There, in disguise, he began his German translation of the New Testament.

Luther eventually was able to return to Wittenberg. He felt that some of his followers had become too extreme in his absence. He denounced the Peasants’ War, a revolt inspired by his reform efforts. Luther tried to shift the Reformation onto more moderate ground but had little success.

In 1525, Luther married Katharina von Bora, a former nun. His marriage reflected his opinion that monks and nuns should be allowed to marry. Luther and Katharina had six children. Luther spent the rest of his life preaching, writing, and organizing the reformed church. His writings are basic to the Lutheran faith. He also composed hymns, including “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

His translation of the New Testament, which took him ten years to complete, helped to standardize the German language.

Luther’s posting of the Ninety-Five Theses led to the establishment of Protestantism—a historic and lasting break with the Catholic Church. For the first time, worshipers could attend a church where the sermon was in their own language, rather than in Latin. They could read and interpret for themselves God’s word in the Bible. Luther retained only two of the sacraments celebrated in the Catholic Church—Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, or communion.

In 1530, Lutherans drew up the Augsburg Confession, which states their articles of faith. However, the reformers themselves quickly became divided. Some split off from the Lutherans and called themselves the Reformed Churches. Other Protestant sects were eventually formed, including the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists.

Although Martin Luther died at Eisleben in 1546, his legacy continues. Because of the Reformation he began, millions of people today worship as Protestants.

Review Questions

1. What were the Ninety-Five Theses?
2. How did Luther define faith?
3. Why was Luther’s translation of the New Testament important?

Critical Thinking

4. **Making Inferences** Why did Luther object to the sale of indulgences?
5. **Drawing Conclusions** Why did Pope Leo X excommunicate Luther? What was Luther’s response?
6. **Summarizing** How does the Lutheran Church reflect Luther’s reforms?