

**PROTESTANT
REFORMATION: MARTIN
LUTHER AND THE 95
THESES**



PROTESTANT REFORMATION: MARTIN LUTHER AND THE 95 THESES

Description

Through an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic outlines of Martin Luther's 95 Theses, his views on salvation and the Roman Catholic Church's response to Luther's writings.

Subjects

European History
World History
English
Humanities

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

180 minutes (2 x 90 min)

Tour Links

- Luther Museum, Wittenberg
- All Saint's Church, Wittenberg
- St Mary's Church, Wittenberg
- Luther birthplace, Eisleben
- Gutenberg Museum, Mainz
- Luther Memorial, Worms

Essential Questions

- Who was Martin Luther?
- What was the “Protestant Reformation”
- Why did Luther Challenge the Catholic Church? What specific issues did he fight against?
- What were Luther’s ideas behind salvation and faith? Why were these ideas considered revolutionary?
- How did the Catholic Church respond to Luther’s attacks?
- Why was Luther successful when others before him were not? What role did Prince Fredrick of Saxony play in protecting Luther?

Academic Summary

There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed (transubstantiation) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself gave to the Apostles and their successors.

Fourth Lateran Council (1215)

“When a coin in the coffer rings...a soul from Purgatory springs.”

Saying attributed to Johann Tezel, Dominican preacher and indulgence seller (1517)

Papal indulgences for the building of St. Peter's are circulating under your most distinguished name, and as regards them, I do not bring accusation against the outcries of the preachers, which I have not heard, so much as I grieve over the wholly false impressions which the people have conceived from them; to wit, -- the unhappy souls believe that if they have purchased letters of indulgence they are sure of their salvation; again, that so soon as they cast their contributions into the money-box, souls fly out of purgatory; furthermore, that these graces [i.e., the graces conferred in the indulgences] are so great that there is no sin too great to be absolved, even, as they say -- though the thing is impossible -- if one had violated the Mother of God; again, that a man is free, through these indulgences, from all penalty and guilt...

... works of piety and love are infinitely better than indulgences, and yet these are not preached with such ceremony or such zeal; nay, for the sake of preaching the indulgences they are kept quiet, though it is the first and the sole duty of all bishops that the people should learn the Gospel and the love of Christ, for Christ never taught that indulgences should be preached. How great then is the horror, how great the peril of a bishop, if he permits the Gospel to be kept quiet, and nothing but the noise of indulgences to be spread among his people! Will not Christ say to them, "straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel"? In addition to this, Most Reverend Father in the Lord, it is said in the Instruction to the Commissaries which is issued under your name, Most Reverend Father (doubtless without your knowledge and consent), that one of the chief graces of indulgence is that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to God, and all the penalties of purgatory are destroyed. Again, it is said that contrition is not necessary in those who purchase souls [out of purgatory] or buy confessionalia.

Martin Luther, Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz (1517)

That is why faith alone makes someone just and fulfills the law; faith it is that brings the Holy Spirit through the merits of Christ. The Spirit, in turn, renders the heart glad and free, as the law demands. Then good works proceed from faith itself. That is what Paul means in chapter 3 when, after he has thrown out the works of the law, he sounds as though he wants to abolish the law by faith. No, he says, we uphold the law through faith, i.e. we fulfill it through faith.

“Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans” (1522) by Martin Luther

Arise, O Lord, and judge your own cause. Remember your reproaches to those who are filled with foolishness all through the day. Listen to our prayers, for foxes have arisen seeking to destroy the vineyard whose winepress you alone have trod. When you were about to ascend to your Father, you committed the care, rule, and administration of the vineyard, an image of the triumphant church, to Peter, as the head and your vicar and his successors. The wild boar from the forest seeks to destroy it and every wild beast feeds upon it.

Rise, Peter, and fulfill this pastoral office divinely entrusted to you as mentioned above.

Give heed to the cause of the holy Roman Church, mother of all churches and teacher of the faith, whom you by the order of God, have consecrated by your blood. Against the Roman Church, you warned, lying teachers are rising, introducing ruinous sects, and drawing upon themselves speedy doom. Their tongues are fire, a restless evil, full of deadly poison. They have bitter zeal, contention in their hearts, and boast and lie against the truth. We beseech you also, Paul, to arise. It was you that enlightened and illuminated the Church by your doctrine and by a martyrdom like Peter's. For now a new Porphyry rises who, as the old once wrongfully assailed the holy apostles, now assails the holy pontiffs, our predecessors.

Pope Leo X, "Exsurge Domine" (Papal Bull Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther), 15 Jun 1520

Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.

Luther's Speech before the Diet of Worms (1521)

For this reason we forbid anyone from this time forward to dare, either by words or by deeds, to receive, defend, sustain, or favor the said Martin Luther. On the contrary, we want him to be apprehended and punished as a notorious heretic, as he deserves, to be brought personally before us, or to be securely guarded until those who have captured him inform us, whereupon we will order the appropriate manner of proceeding against the said Luther. Those who will help in his capture will be rewarded generously for their good work.

Edict of Worms, issued 25 May 1521 by Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor

Secondary Summary

On 31 Oct 1517, Dr. Martin Luther, professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg, nailed a document known as the 95 Theses to the front door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg for all to see, hoping to spark debate on what he believed was a most pressing subject... the selling of indulgences.

Indulgences were slips of paper issued by the Vatican relieving the buyer of the penalties of sin or cutting one's time in purgatory. They could be purchased for the buyer's own sins or for others, such as relatives, alive or deceased. Although the selling of indulgences was not specifically part of Catholic doctrine, by 1517 the practice was widespread. That year, Pope Leo X issued a special indulgence for the building and reconstruction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He also made Johann Tetzel of Saxony the commissioner of indulgences for the German lands. Tetzel took his job with a religious fervor and an enthusiasm that soon brought in a great deal of money for the Church. By summer, he was famous all around Germany. After Luther's 95 Theses were published in German, however, the practice of indulgences came to a grinding halt.

Unlike previous reformers, Luther had a number of advantages. He wrote in German so commoners could understand his thoughts. The printing press, invented decades earlier in Mainz, allowed his works to be published in huge numbers. Finally, the political situation at the time in the northern Germanic lands allowed powerful princes like Frederick of Saxony to support Luther against the Pope.

Although he never intended to do so, Luther became the lynchpin for a period of reform known as the Protestant Reformation. The movement eventually fractured Christendom and led to a series of wars that killed tens of millions of Europeans over the next 150 years. Luther's nailing of the 95 Theses (1517) is considered to be one of the pivotal turning points in world, European and human history.

Through an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this

lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic outlines of Martin Luther's 95 Theses, his views on salvation and the Roman Catholic Church's response to Luther's writings.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain Martin Luther's beliefs on salvation, faith and the sale of indulgences.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the major points of Martin Luther's 95 Theses.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the newly invented printing press helped Luther's message spread across the German lands.
4. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the Catholic Church's response to Luther's criticisms and writings.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What was the Catholic Church's position on salvation before the Renaissance? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed below. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief Overview of Indulgences and Luther's 95 Theses (20 min)
- Video – Martin Luther: Reluctant Revolutionary (55 min) or Martin Luther (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles about Martin Luther, his ideas behind salvation and his break with the Catholic Church, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework the night before class to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Assign different readings to different student groups.
- Group Activity – Discussion on Luther's ideas on salvation and his break with the Catholic Church. (30 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the basic outlines of Martin Luther's 95 Theses, his views on how to achieve salvation and the Roman Catholic Church's response to his writings.

Extension

On tour: Luther House and Museum, Wittenberg

While on tour, students can visit the Luther House and Museum in Wittenberg, Germany, the most important and interesting Reformation museum in Germany. It is located in the Augustinian monastery where Luther lived, first as a monk and later as owner with his family. In addition to the well-preserved rooms that were used by Luther, the museum contains an unsurpassed collection of Reformation manuscripts and artifacts. While in town, students can also see the Castle Church (All Saints Church), where Luther posted the 95 theses to the front door on 31 Oct 1517 (the original wooden doors were destroyed in a fire in 1760 – the bronze doors currently on the church were installed in 1858 for the 375th anniversary of Luther's birth. Luther and Fredrick are both buried on the grounds of the Castle Church.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.thenagain.info/Classes/Sources/Luther.html
Martin Luther: Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (1520) – primary source. Excerpts from Luther’s famous work.
- www.projectwittenberg.org/
Project Wittenberg (website) – primary and secondary sources on Martin Luther and the Reformation.
- www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/luther-romans/
Luther on Romans (website) – article on Luther and the Book of Romans (where he got his ideas on salvation through faith).
- [www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/modsbook02.asp#Protestant Reformation](http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/modsbook02.asp#Protestant%20Reformation)
The Protestant Reformation – from the Modern Internet sourcebook at Fordham University.
- www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-luther.html
Selected Works of Martin Luther 1483-1546 (website) – primary and secondary sources on and from Luther. Great repository of Luther’s works – including letters, sermons and songs from Luther himself. Highly recommended for teachers and students.
- www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/ninetyfive.html
The 95 Theses: Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences – primary source.
- www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-faith.txt

Martin Luther’s Definition of Faith (primary source)

- www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo10/I10exdom.htm
Exsurge Domine: Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther, Bull of Pope Leo X, issued 15 Jun 1520
- http://www.nobts.edu/faculty/atoh/ButlerR/CH2_Unit_1b.Martin_Luther.ppt
Martin Luther PowerPoint -- from Rex Butler, Professor of Church History at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFqWnEpZvjs
The Reformation: Martin Luther (video), 10 minutes. Part of a documentary on Luther and his writings.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=ni1gupkGAW0
Martin Luther: Reluctant Revolutionary (video). This video, produced by PBS, at just over 55 minutes, is perhaps too long for some classes, but is particularly valuable for both students and teachers who want to understand Luther and his revolution. Highly recommended.

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther
Martin Luther – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ninety-Five_Theses
The 95 Theses – Wikipedia article

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1521_Diet_of_Worms
The Diet of Worms (1521) – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Leo_X
Pope Leo X – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_III,_Elector_of_Saxony
Fredrick III (of Saxony) – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augsburg_Confession
Augsburg Confession (1520) – Wikipedia article on the primary confession of faith of the Lutheran church. Presented to the Diet of Augsburg in 1530.
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_the_Christian_Nobility_of_the_German_Nation
To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exsurge_Domine
Exsurge Domine (Arise O Lord) – Wikipedia article on the papal bull issued by Leo X against Luther in 1520
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/germany/country_profile
On the Road: Germany (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/sir-thomas-more
Reformation England – Sir Thomas More
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/english-reformation
Reformation England – An Overview
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/reformation-britain-pilgrimage-of-grace
Reformation England – Pilgrimage of Grace 1536-37
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/anne-of-cleves
Reformation England – Anne of Cleves: Henry's 4th Wife and Beloved Sister
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/protestant-reformation-french-huguenots
Protestant Reformation – French Huguenots
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/martin-luther-95-theses
Protestant Reformation – Luther and the 95 Theses 1517
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/switzerland/john-calvin-and-predestination
Protestant Reformation – John Calvin and Predestination

Key Terms

- Catholic Church
- Indulgences
- Justification / Salvation
- Martin Luther
- Papal Bull
- Protestant
- Reformation
- Romans (book of)

