

Martin Luther

- Most prominent leader of a reform movement in 16th century Christianity (Protestant Reformation)
 - Lived in Saxony (now Germany) 1483-1546
 - Reared in a very religious home but had no aspirations to enter religious life
 - Completed a Master of Arts degree and began to study law and planned to become a lawyer
 - July 1505 he (or his friend) was struck down by a bolt of lightning, in terror, he vowed to become a monk
 - “Revelation in the tower” – experienced a religious transformation

Martin Luther’s Theology

- Sought to recover core New Testament teachings – which he claimed had been obscured by corruption and worldly traditions of medieval Catholicism
- He wanted to remove only the things he felt were contrary to Scripture
- *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* 1517 – Ninety-seven theses which attacked the idea that believers could be justified before God on the basis of their works
- *Ninety-five Theses*
 - Theses were the basis for a scholarly debate - nailed them to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on Oct 31, 1517
 - Protesting a Church wide campaign to raise funds for the completion of Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome by sale of indulgences
 - Sacrament of penance removed the guilt of sin, and it’s eternal punishment due to mortal sin; but there still remains the temporal punishment required by divine justice = time in Purgatory
 - Church possesses the extra-sacramental power to remit these punishments through *indulgences* based on the superabundant merits of Christ and of the saints
 - Incensed by the sale of indulgences by a monk named Tetzel who promised people that as soon as their money fell into the coffer, a soul rose from purgatory
 - Widely read throughout Germany because of the new printing press
 - Produced a firestorm which ignited the Protestant Reformation
- *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* - “Priesthood of all believers”
 - All Christians were priests by virtue of baptism
 - Popes and the church hierarchy were not superior to the believer. Claimed that priests had the power of discerning what is right or wrong in matters of faith
 - If the pope acts contrary to scripture and is an offense to Christendom, there needed to be a “truly free council” which Luther maintained could only be summoned by temporal authorities, whom he noted were “fellow Christians” and “fellow priests”
 - Clerical marriage should be permitted

- Reduce the number of holy days
- Held that beggary (including monks) should be forbidden
- *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*
 - Addressed the sacraments of the church
 - Maintained that only baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted by Christ
 - Penance, contrition, confession, absolution – had value as a relief to distressed consciences
 - Monastic vows, pilgrimages – “Man-made substitutes” for the divine word of forgiveness
 - Confirmation, matrimony, clerical orders, and extreme unction (Last Rites) – had no sacramental standing in scripture
 - Challenged the doctrine of transubstantiation (Eucharist question)
- *Freedom of a Christian*
 - Laid out his ethical vision
 - “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all”
 - Attempted to show that the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fides*) was not incompatible with Christian love and service
 - “Faith is enough for the Christian man. He has no need for works to be made just.”
 - “Good works do not produce a good man but a good man does good work”

Luther's Career

- Luther was led into more and more controversy with the papacy
- Luther's writings were widely distributed: new technology of the printing press
- Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, convened an imperial diet (court) at Worms in April 1521 to try Luther
 - Luther refused to recant or retract any of the contents of his writings
 - Placed under an imperial edict that banned the printing and sale of his books. It had been expected that he would be burned as a heretic, however the emperor was too busy with other matters
- Luther was kidnapped by Frederick the Wise and taken to Wartburg Castle, where he lived for almost a year
 - Translated the Bible into German
 - His translations of Scripture became classics in the German language
- 1522 Luther returned to Wittenberg and took charge of the Reformation
 - Not a radical – wanted to reach back to the ancient Catholicism and the writings of St. Paul
 - Agreed with St. Augustine's doctrine of determinism and predestination
 - Alienated the humanist Erasmus who had been an early supporter