

Martin Luther's role in the German Reformation

Martin Luther was born in Saxony. His father was a well off copper miner. Martin Luther was well educated and very intelligent. He was a highly nervous child as his parents were very strict. He was beaten a lot at home and in school. Once when Luther was out he got caught in a thunderstorm and was terrified. He was so terrified that he made a promise to St. Anne that if he survived he would become a monk. He did.

He became a professor of theology in Frederick the Wise's university in Wittenberg. Luther was obsessed with the idea of being saved when he died (heaven). He was permanently unhappy and unknown. He lived out of the way and was continuously confessing, praying trying to figure out how he was going to be saved. One day Luther was praying in his cell when the answer to his question came to him. You don't have to pray and confess all the time just do nothing and believe and God will look after everything. Luther called this "Salvation by faith alone". Suddenly, he was a happy man and that should have been the end of that for Luther.

But at this time Pope Leo X was rebuilding St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He invented "indulgencies" to raise the money. The indulgencies said that when you died you didn't go to heaven or hell; you went to place called purgatory which was in between the two. There you had to wait until God decided where you went but if you paid the pope to pray for you, you would go straight to heaven. Indulgency sellers were sent all over Europe and one of them arrived in Wittenberg, where Luther lived.

John Tetzel was the indulgency seller that arrived in Wittenberg. Luther was horrified at the idea that you could buy salvation like you would buy a sack of spuds. Luther believed that the pope was selling salvation. When Tetzel arrived Luther called him a donkey from Rome and began to put together his 95 theses these were arguments or disagreements with the indulgencies. At first the 95 theses were written in Latin but soon after, someone translated them to German and printed 1000s of copies. Luther's teachings won over a lot of support. The differences between what Luther believed and the church's teachings were:

Luther believed that you would go to heaven when you died by just having faith in god but the church said you also had to live well and work hard.

Luther said that if you wanted to learn about god that you should read the bible yourself, that there was no need for priests and bishops but the church said that you had to listen to church teachings as well.

Luther said that the pope shouldn't be the head of the church but the local prince should be.

Luther said that there were only 2 sacraments as there were only 2 mentioned in the bible not the 7 that the Catholic Church said there were.

Pope Leo X sent a very skilled debater, John Eck, to have a public debate about the indulgencies. Eck forced Luther to say that he didn't believe anything the popes said, only what's written in the bible. This meant that Luther had rejected the pope's right to rule the church. This was called heresy. The punishment for this was to be burned at the

steak.

Pope Leo X was very surprised at Luther. He issued a papal bull to Luther. This gave him 60 days to admit he was wrong or be excommunicated from the church. Luther would not change his mind. In a gesture to the pope he burned the letter in public.

The pope was really worried as the poor and the rich were starting to join Luther. The poor saw Luther as a way out of their poverty. The rich saw Luther as money and lands the church had loads of both. The pope turned to the Emperor Charles V for help but Charles didn't want to upset Frederick the wise as he was Luther's protector. Frederick persuaded the emperor to let Luther explain his beliefs at a diet. This was a meeting of all the princes of Germany.

Luther went to the Diet of worms and spoke in front of the emperor and the princes. Luther still wouldn't forget about his beliefs. He said: "I cannot and I will not go back on anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe". The emperor kept his promise and let Luther go free unharmed but afterwards issued the Edict of Worms. This declared Luther an outlaw. This meant that anyone could kill him without punishment. Frederick the wise got his soldiers to kidnap Luther and take him to his castle. Luther stayed here for a year. During that time he translated the bible into German. This was very important as Luther believed that everyone should be able to read the bible, not just church members. His translation was printed and spread all over Germany. This won over many more Germans onto his side.

Anyone who switched from the catholic religion to Lutheranism didn't have to pay taxes to the pope. The princes liked the idea that under Luther's religion they would be the head of their local church and that they would get the power that the pope had. The princes also liked that Luther did not believe in monasteries, nuns or monks. This meant that under Lutheranism they could move in and take their land. Luther led to other people across Europe putting their views and beliefs forward join Lutheranism or start their own religion. People like John Calvin, Henry VIII and John Knox were all reformers.

The Catholic Church hit back by reforming themselves at the Council of Trent. Newly elected pope Paul III called on the reform. This involved stamping out abuses and making the church's beliefs and views clearer. It also involved stopping the spread of Protestantism. A religious group called the Jesuits, founded by Ignatius Loyola, led the inquisition. The Jesuits were based on a military structure used by Hitler. If you didn't convert back to the catholic religion you were forced to through torture. The Spanish inquisition was the worst. The reformation also led to great civil wars in Germany, Holland and France.