Patterns of Life in the Spirit - Martin Luther

By James M. Stanton

Introduction

Martin Luther was 36 years of age when he had a spiritual awakening that would change his life, provide a basis for his unfolding theology and profoundly shape Western Christianity ever afterward. He was, at the time, an Augustinian monk and an academic who was translating the Psalms and working on his lectures as Doctor of Bible at Wittenberg University. The year was 1519.

Pope Leo X

Luther had already made a mark on Christian history with his famous *95 Theses* sent to the Archbishop of Mainz. Some say he nailed his theses to the Wittenberg Chapel door as a way of inviting debate – a customary procedure for engaging serious theological and academic discussions at the time. The date was October 31, 1517, and is usually cited as the day the Reformation got started. But the *Theses* primarily had to do with the abuses of the sale of indulgences or "pardons" and the Pope's responsibility in regard to this practice. A certain Johann Tetzel, a Dominican preacher, had been authorized to promote the sale of indulgences in Germany in order to raise money for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Church in Rome. Tetzel had turned the enterprise into an industry, claiming that as soon as "a penny dropped into the box a soul would fly from purgatory."

Luther had raised issues about the place, purpose and limits of the doctrine of forgiveness in the *Theses*, but none of the great themes that would be characteristic of Luther's theology were brought up in them: justification, the role of faith or grace, the central place of Scripture, and so forth. The sale of indulgences was offensive to Luther's theological sensibilities, but he evidently did not intend to provoke a serious confrontation, let alone a break, with the Church which he served with singular devotion.


Luther before Cajetan

The *Theses* provoked controversy nevertheless. Pope Leo X had received a copy of them from the Archbishop. The Pope took some time to have the document carefully studied. A case against Luther was drawn up in due course, and the Pope ordered Luther to Rome to be examined. But the Prince Elector Frederick suggested to the Pope instead that Luther be examined at the Imperial Diet in Augsburg. The Pope sent his legate, Thomas Cardinal Cajetan, to carry out this examination in 1518.

At this examination, Luther made clear to the Cardinal that he did not believe the papacy to be rooted in the biblical conception of the Church, but he did not intend to challenge the Pope's authority even so. Cajetan thought this declaration was sufficient to arrest Luther. But since the legate did not have the authority to enforce this judgment, Luther left Augsburg under Frederick's protection. He returned to Wittenberg.

In the meantime, Leo had decided to reach out to and win the support of Frederick. He gave him the Golden Rose of Virtue, a prized award reserved to princes enjoying papal favor. Leo then sent this award with the newly ap-

pointed nuncio, Karl von Miltitz. The nuncio came to Altenburg in January 1519 to present the award and, in the course of things, met with Luther. Miltitz was seeking a charitable settlement of the controversy. He offered Luther a deal: Luther would keep silent on the matter of indulgences and would write a letter to the Pope of a conciliatory nature and write a tract supporting the Pope's authority. In return, Miltitz would bring Tetzel and the Archbishop into compliance, silencing them against Luther. Luther would not have to recant his position in the *Theses*. In the end the whole matter, it was hoped, would simply fade away.

Johann Tetzel

Miltitz actually implicated Tetzel in charges of immorality and embezzlement. This marginalized Tetzel, and the stress evidently took its toll on the Dominican preacher who, suddenly out of favor and embroiled in scandal, died in July of 1519. (Ironically, Luther sent a letter to Tetzel on his death bed in some sense absolving Tetzel of any wrongdoing: the "child," meaning the scandal, "has a different father."(Ganss))

It was in the context of this swirling controversy that Luther had his awakening. (Luther, Preface, 1545)

While working on the Psalms, he says he kept coming back to a single passage in Romans, 1.17: "For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed". This was a "block" to Luther. He says he "hated" this passage. He understood righteousness as a "formal" characteristic of God by which God punishes unrighteous sinners. He grew angry as he thought more and more about this idea. He writes, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!"

He says he meditated on this single passage for hours on end, day in and day out. Then, finally, he saw the context. Paul also writes in the same verse: "He who through faith is righteous shall live." This is a quotation of Habakkuk 2.4. Here, he says, he began to understand the righteousness of God is a gift to sinners, a gift of faith by which they come to be righteous in turn. God, far from "lording" his righteousness over sinners actually gives his righteousness to them if they trust in him! This removed all the burdens from Luther – the heavy and fruitless burden of trying to earn righteousness – and caused him to feel completely free. He said he felt truly "born again." And what is more, he writes, "There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me." He called this single passage the "gate of paradise," and after walking through it found that all his hate had been transformed into "sweetest love".


Luther as a young monk

It was shortly after this awakening that Luther took up Miltitz on his suggestion, and wrote a letter to the Pope. He also wrote a tract. But instead of a tract in support of papal authority, he wrote a tract on *the Freedom of the Christian*. And it is clear that this tract was the "first fruits" of this encounter with grace and God's call to faith. It is to that tract we now turn.

The Goal of the Christian life

Luther starts right at the beginning with the statement that the Christian faith "is a living fountain, springing up unto eternal life." (225) The goal of the Christian life is to enter and participate in "eternal life." But as we have seen over and over again, eternal life – the kingdom of God – concerns not only the future life, life in heaven, life after death, but also life here and now.

Luther uses the image of "king and priest" to describe Christ and the gift that Christ "imparts and communicates to every believer in him". (491-92)

On the one hand, being "king" means being "completely lord of all things". (497) This means being freed from the slavery of fear and hurt, guilt and anxiety, distress and even death. The Christian is freed to experience life in its

fullness. He or she is to possess a "lofty and eminent dignity," and an "inestimable power and liberty". (510, 514)

On the other, being "priest" – and he puts emphasis on "priests forever" – is a "dignity far higher than kingship." (516) It is the duty of the priest to appear before God, to pray for others and to teach one another the things of God. We are united with Christ in his priesthood, and that begins now but has its fulfillment in eternity. Priests are to know and serve God's glory both here and hereafter.

The Basis of Life in Christ

How does one receive and participate in the work of Christ? The basis for life in Christ can be expressed in two words: justification and faith.

Justification – to be justified – is to be set in a right relationship to God. This concerns the "inward man", says Luther, what we call the soul or the spiritual aspect of human existence. It is clear, Luther writes, that the health and well-being of the inward man is ultimately unaffected by the outward or physical condition. A man may be a slave, live in poor conditions, eat a meager diet, and yet be free inwardly, possess great strength of character and dignity of person. On the other hand, one may wear beautiful clothing, even sacred vestments, live in palaces and dine on the best of foods and still be a hypocrite, or enslaved to sin. To be in a right relationship to God is then preeminently a spiritual matter. It is a matter of the heart, the will, the mind, and all of them taken together as the spiritual aspect of human existence.

If this is so, then it follows that the physical aspects of life can in no way effect or bring about justification. Only one thing is necessary – "necessary for life, for justification and Christian liberty" – and that is "the word of God." (269-271) Luther quotes from Mt 4.4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." And he sharpens the notion of the "word of God" to mean "the Gospel of Christ." Luther writes:

> Let us therefore hold it for certain and firmly established, that the soul can do without everything, except the word of God, without which none at all of its wants are provided for. (275)

But with the word of God, the soul possesses "life, truth, light, peace, justification, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, virtue, grace, glory and every good thing." And the soul comes to possess these things by the preaching of Christ. To preach Christ, Luther says, is "to feed the soul, to justify it, to set it free, and to save it". (291-291)

But how does this work? The answer is "by faith alone." Faith is believing what has been preached, trusting in the word of God, claiming God's promises for one's own.

There are two aspects to this act of faith.

First, we must hear God's indictment of our condition. We are all sinners, all guilty, all fallen. This is an essential part of God's word. "The voice of the law should be brought forward, that men may be terrified and brought to a knowledge of their sins, and thence be converted to penitence and to a better manner of life." (742-744) Scripture performs the function of a mirror, showing man's nature to himself. (342) It reveals his "impotence" and even more, provokes "despair" that he can ever overcome his fallen condition. For a simple example, consider, says Luther, the commandment "thou shalt not covet." "No man can help coveting," says Luther. And what is true of this one commandment is, by Christ's teaching, true of all: just think of the commandment not to commit adultery as it is interpreted and applied in the Sermon on the Mount!

The second aspect of faith, however, is to trust in God's promises. Luther says that "the whole Scripture of God" is divided into two parts: the precepts and the promises. The precepts are meant to drive us to the promises. The precepts show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do them. (339-341) But "the promises of God give that which the precepts exact, and fulfill what the law commands." (364)

There are three virtues of faith, according to Luther. The first is that it unites the soul to God's promises. He uses the image of iron in the fire. As it is heated, the iron, otherwise cold and hard, becomes a glowing, malleable

thing. It is transformed. So it is with the soul that "cleaves" to God's word in faith – it is transformed and changed according to God's purposes. (366-374) Second, it honors God by holding Him to be supremely trustworthy and truthful. (375 ff) Failure to trust God is an insult. Trusting God gives Him glory and is the highest form of worship. And when we honor God by faith, He honors us in return, by attributing to us truth and righteousness. (399-401) Third, faith unites the soul to Christ. (408) Here Luther uses a powerful analogy: that of marriage. In a marriage, all that the parties possess becomes the property of the other. This is true of "the good things and the evil." (412) Christ claims whatever belongs to our souls as his own – he takes on our sin, our shame, our unrighteousness. And in the relationship, whatever belongs to Christ becomes ours: grace, life, salvation. (415) Faith is like the wedding ring (424) which is the sign of the union between our souls and Christ.

This two-fold movement of faith, acknowledging our wretchedness and impotence, and trusting in God's promises is what brings about justification.

The Character of Life in Christ

The difference between *The 95 Theses* and the essay *On the Freedom of the Christian* is found in a passage from Matthew quoted in both documents: Mt 3.2, "Repent" – in Latin "Paenitentiam agite". In the *Theses*, Luther writes "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ . . . willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance." In *Freedom*, however, he writes: "though it is good to preach and write about penitence, confession, and satisfaction, yet if, we stop there, and do not go on to teach faith, such teaching is without doubt deceitful and devilish." Then he cites the Matthew quote but places it in a fuller context: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom of heaven here is the Good News – the promise which is to be trusted, and if trusted and believed changes everything!

We may discuss the character of life in Christ under two headings: *the theology of the cross* and *service*.

Theology of the Cross

Luther scholars have given a tremendous amount of attention to Luther's theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*). However, Luther himself does not make much explicit use of the term – it does not occur at all in *Freedom*. Yet there is a remarkable and unique emphasis on the cross in this writer. Whereas, in the Middle Ages there was a lot of attention given to meditating on the cross of Christ, his passion and suffering, such meditation was affectional in character: one tried to empathize with, take in the suffering of Christ. One might even be moved to change his manner of life by dwelling on this sacrifice and resolving to follow the teaching and example of the Master. In fact, a long-standing tradition in monastic circles was that there was a two-fold movement in this meditation on the Cross: on the one hand there was a positive evaluation of the place of suffering inasmuch as it would bring on humility. Christ's example shows this to be so – "he humbled himself, taking on the role of a servant, and became obedient even unto death." On the other hand, one was to see contrition and humility as virtues that, as they strengthened in the soul, would lead one to love God more and more completely. In such a situation, ironically, humility was turned into a work, and the more one meditated on the passion, the more one would work toward humility.

For Luther, meditation on the cross led to a deep sense of humility and despair on the one hand, and gratitude on the other. The humility and despair came from the crushing recognition that our sins put Christ upon the cross. It was to deal with sin that Christ came among us, suffered and died. And it is in the cross that we most clearly see the nature of God: God is willing to bear our shame and guilt, and even to die It is God's work, not ours, that brings about humility and that awakens gratitude for the new freedom He bestows.

In the *Freedom*, Luther says that the customary way of preaching Christ, what he calls the "historic manner", (545) is no longer sufficient. One cannot deal with the life, work and teaching of Christ as something merely past and as "an example by which to frame our lives." Even the affectional appreciation of Christ's pains and agony in some sense externalizes the cross. While Christ's suffering and death is an objective, historical reality, we must realize that at the same time it is intensely real, immediate, personal, and enduring. Christ died for me, for us

(*pro me/pro nobis*). This "for me" dimension may be taken in all of the following ways: Christ died *because* of my sins – *in order* to destroy my sins – and *in my place*. Christ died because my sin is an affront to God and in order to deal with my sin he made his sacrifice. Christ died in order to eradicate my sin. And he died in my place so that I might not have to die as a result of sin.

A careful study of the marriage analogy which we suggested earlier brings all of this out. Christ, the groom, is sinless, deathless, and cannot be condemned. Yet, in taking to himself his bride – us – he takes our sin, our death and our condemnation to be his own.(421-429) Christ "takes a share in the sins, death and hell of his wife, nay makes them his own, and deals with them no otherwise than as if they were his, and as if he himself had sinned."

This meditation on the cross turns everything upside down. The working assumption of the natural man is that while something has gone wrong in the human situation, God has given us his precepts and his spirit and calls forth from us our best efforts in living by them both. At base, we have the power to control and discipline ourselves, and to raise ourselves out of the demeaning mire of sin. The word of God, the laws and sacraments of the Church, and the guidance of the Spirit cooperate with our spirits in this uplift. This Luther calls the theology of glory.

By contrast, the theology of the cross calls into question all these assumptions. We cannot know God except as God reveals himself. This he has done in the Cross. His law does not encourage us – it demoralizes us and drives us to our knees in despair. "There is none righteous, no not one." Even the good we try to do on our own distorts us by making us feel self-confident, and it perpetuates the illusion that we can earn God's love and favor. We even wind up constructing our beliefs about God in ways that will correspond with our sense about right and wrong, what is virtuous and what is not. The philosophical notion of the impassibility of God – the notion that God cannot feel pain and is ultimately beyond and removed from the human – is a case in point. The medieval Church had borrowed this philosophical idea and built an edifice on it.

What the cross shows us is that this impassible God is the impossible God – is not the true God. God takes on Himself the sin, shame and even death that properly belongs to us humans. And what properly belongs to God – freedom, love, goodness, eternal life – he gives to those who believe and trust him. All the efforts we employ to raise ourselves out of sin not only do not avail, but make matters worse. The only thing that counts is faith, trust, in the God of the Cross.

Luther had anticipated this in the Heidelberg Disputation when he wrote, "true theology and the knowledge of God are in the crucified Christ." His experience of awakening with which began supplied the key of faith that opened the door to paradise.

The character of the Christian life then is to know the true God and to give thanks for His grace and goodness by faith. But this in turn leads to service.

Service

As we said, the theology of the cross turned everything upside down. In its light we see a different God. We also see a different way to be human.

No man comes to salvation by works. This is Luther's repeated claim. But does this mean that works are completely unimportant? Is one then freed completely from any sense of law or obligation? By no means. (574 ff) Luther actually gives considerable space to the proper place of works in the *Freedom*.

Again, he uses an image. A bishop, Luther writes, is not consecrated by doing the things a bishop does, such as dedicating churches, or confirming children, or blessing people. These actions of the bishop are valid only if he has already been consecrated. So it is with works and righteousness. One does not *become* righteous by doing works, but by *being righteous* one does works that count. "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works." (641)

If anything, good works are done by the Christian in imitation of Christ himself. In the first place, this work is offered to glorify God. "In perfect freedom he does gratuitously all that he does," Luther writes, "seeking nothing either of profit or of salvation . . . but solely that which is well-pleasing to God." (662 ff)

In the second place, the Christian follows the example of Christ as set forth in Paul's letter to the Philippians, that is becoming a servant of others. "Here is the truly Christian life; here is faith really working by love; when a man applies himself with joy and love to the works of that freest servitude, in which he serves others voluntarily and for nought." (746 ff.)

Luther brings these two facets of service together with his theology of the cross in one of the most wonderful passages – one that has the character of prayer:

> Lo! my God, without merit on my part, of His pure and free mercy, has given to me, an unworthy, condemned, and contemptible creature, all the riches of justification and salvation in Christ, so that I no longer am in want of anything, except of faith to believe that this is so. For such a Father then, who has overwhelmed me with these inestimable riches of His, why should I not freely, cheerfully, and with my whole heart and from voluntary zeal, do all that I know will be pleasing to Him, and acceptable in His sight? I will therefore give myself, as a sort of Christ, to my neighbor, as Christ has given Himself to me; and will do nothing in this life, except what I see will be needful, advantageous, and wholesome for my neighbor, since by faith I abound in all good things in Christ.

There are many practical aspects to Luther's teaching on service. *The Freedom of the Christian* is not a complete statement of Luther's theology – it is a beginning. He thus addresses many things more by implication than directly.

For example, he addresses the ministry of the Church and the mission of the Church, but indirectly. It is clear that the Church must serve the Gospel, must preach and teach and inculcate at every turn the truth that in Christ God has dealt with our sin and extended to us true righteousness, and that this gift can only be received by faith. Christians indeed were made to live in community, and to be nurtured by community. This is part of the character of life in Christ. But we must realize that the Church does not make us holy and ministry does not us righteous.

By the same token, the sacraments serve to nourish Christians and are part of the character of life in Christian. But they do not do this in and of themselves. There is nothing to be gained by making many masses, or of making many confessions. What brings the power of the sacraments to bear is when we hear through them the grace of God, the good news that we are forgiven by God, that Christ is with us, and believe that this is so by faith.

Even the spiritual disciplines – fasts and watches and meditations - have their place once we get the relationship between righteousness and faith right. These mark the character of life in Christ if they help us focus on the Cross of Christ, restrain our lusts and appetites, and give our thanks to God. These things do not *add* anything to us, for we already possess in Christ all things; but they may *aid* us in appreciating and living out this fact.

Luther will continue to unfold his theology in his subsequent writings. Many of these are highly polemical, since he was always in some sense on trial, always contending against a huge superstructure of Church order and ingrained theological traditions. But he also wrote sermons to help shape Christians in living their faith daily, wrote devotional works and letters addressed to searchers on the proper way to be Christian, and catechisms aimed at educating particularly the young in the great truths of the Christian faith and that are still in use today. His translation of the Bible set a standard that educated and, in no little way, shaped the culture of Germany. His hymns also instruct and form. All these are well worth reading and exploring.

Conclusion

Luther represents a major turning point in Christian history. For this reason, he has been the object of study by scholars not only of theology, but of history, politics, economics and even psychology. His life and work, to my mind, can only be explained however as a spiritual quest. When he was a young man, his father wanted him to study law. But this was unsatisfying to Luther because he wanted more certainty than the study of law could afford. He turned to philosophy, and was equally unsatisfied. He became a monk, but a very restless one. His superior identified this trait early on and sought to harness his restless energy by making him a teacher in theology.

Not surprisingly, the dynamism of his soul caught the dynamism of another student of the Law, Saul of Tarsus.

And like him, Luther awoke to the power of the crucified and risen Christ. In this awakening, Luther found the certainty after which he strived so long. It was a certainty based not on the human capacity to know God, but on God's determination to know, love, forgive and free the human soul.

Luther's theology as represented in this essay on the Freedom of the Christian has three enduring contributions to make to us.

First, it shows the power of the Cross. The crucifixion and the resurrection are not merely past events: they have the power to transform life here and now, and in each person. We cannot know God except as God reveals Himself. And God reveals Himself in sacrifice. God reveals his power in weakness. God reveals His grace in our need. Ours is a self-help culture. We have an essentially positive view of human nature – we all want better things for ourselves, and believe that the more we exert ourselves, the better life will be. To the extent that God plays any role in our lives, it is to assist us in our upward climb. Spirituality is but one of many tools at our disposal in self-help, and to the extent that God helps, it is to inspire us to our better selves. There is a little saying that goes: Life is God's gift to you – what you make it is your gift to God. But this God is too remote, too benign and disinterested to be of much real help. The Cross shows instead a very different God. Our self-directed efforts are against God and actually are responsible for the Crucifixion: sin – self-will – nailed Christ to the Cross. And yet, God takes on this sin, shatters our pretensions and offers us Himself. Faith yields to this judgment and grace, this shattering and this gift, by saying no to the self and yes to God. United to Christ in his death, we overcome the world and receive the resurrection to eternal, deep and liberated life.

Second, there must be a conformity between the knower and what is known. The Christian must be conformed to Christ. Godliness is not a matter of externals – of so much knowledge, or of so many disciplines, or of works of merit, sacraments, religiosity. It is much more intimate and internal. Godliness is God-likeness. Luther's criticism of indulgences had to do with God's forgiveness. The pope could and should "empty purgatory" on account of "holy love," that is because he is the bearer of God's grace, not for money. And ultimately this is not just a criticism of the pope but of all Christians whose lives do not demonstrate conformity with the Word they preach.

Third, faith itself is not strength of belief, but trust. It is belief translated into action. In the end it is believing the promises of God and relying on them rather than what we normally think of as orthodoxy – getting the formulas of belief right.

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BRIEF HISTORY OF MARTIN LUTHER

Born to Hans and Margarethe Luther on 10 Nov 1483 in Eisleben, Germany, the Holy Roman Empire. Baptized on the feast of St Martin of Tours, 11 Nov. He had several brothers and sisters, and was close to one, Jacob.

His father was a leaseholder of copper mines and smelters and a member of the local council at Mansfeld. He wanted Martin to be a lawyer and sent him to Latin school in Magdeburg and Eisenach. Luther would later describe his school experience as time in purgatory and hell!

He entered the University of Erfurt at age 19. He described it as a "whorehouse and beer house." His day began at 4 AM. He took his masters degree in 1505.

Luther entered Erfurt Law School, but dropped out quickly. The Law, he said, represented uncertainty and he was looking for something more solid. He pursued studies in philosophy and theology, studying Aristotle, William of Ockham, and Gabriel Biel. He learned critical thinking from two tutors, Bartholomaus von Usingen and Jacobus Trutfetter. They believed everything should be tested by experience.

Philosophy was unsatisfying to Luther. Reason could only lead one so far, and certainly not to God. Knowledge of God could only come from revelation, and not surprisingly Scripture came to be increasingly important to him.

In the summer after his master's degree had been awarded, and after he had entered law school, he was returning to school from a visit home. A furious storm gathered about him and a lightning bolt struck near him. He cried out to St Anna to help him, promising that he would become a monk. That was on July 12. On the 17th he entered an Augustinian friary in Erfurt. His friends were dismayed. His father was furious.

Johann von Staupitz

Luther was a thoroughly dedicated monk. His life was characterized by fasting, long hours spent in prayer, frequent confessions and even pilgrimages. But this time was not one of spiritual joy – he said later "I lost touch with Christ the Savior and Comforter, and made of him a jailor and hangman of my poor soul."(Kittelson, 1986)

Luther's superior, Johann von Staupitz (1460-1524) decided that Luther needed more work to take him away from his introspection and ordered that he begin teaching. In 1507 he was ordained a Priest and in 1508 began teaching theology at

the University of Wittenberg., which had been founded by Elector Frederick in 1502. Luther took his bachelor's degree in biblical studies in 1508, and a bachelor's degree on Peter Lombard's Sentences in 1509. He received a doctoral degree in theology in 1512 and just days later was received into the senate of the theological faculty. He was given the position "Doctor in Bible" at the University where he remained.

Johann Tetzel preaching indulgences

In 1516, Johann Tetzel (1465-1519) came to Germany to raise money for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Tetzel was an estimable preacher. He could rivet people with sermons on hell and purgatory, and at the appropriate moment offer instant relief – the purchase of indulgences. Although the theology of the Church rested on the forgiveness of sins brought about by the sacrifice of Christ, it was thought that salvation was completed by good works and especially works of charity. The notion grew up that Christ had established a treasury of merit in his sacrifice. This treasury was enlarged by the works of saints and martyrs. Indulgences were understood as acts of charity, wherein one could draw on this treasury of merit. Indulgences affected only venial sins – those which did not entail eternal punishment (reserved only for grave or mortal sins). Venial sins carried only temporal punishment, which either had to be atoned for in this life or in purgatory. Thus the attraction of indulgences. Tetzel was quoted by Luther: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs!"

The sale of indulgences was offensive to Luther's theological sensibilities. He registered his objection in a series of critical questions which became known as *The 95 Theses*. These were addressed to the Archbishop of Mainz on 31 Oct 1517. Luther evidently did not intend an open confrontation let alone a break with the Church, but his Theses implied a serious criticism of the whole Church structure, and especially the Pope.(Hillerbrand, 2007)

It is often said that the *Theses* were nailed to the door of All Saints church (Melanchthon). This is questionable. But it really doesn't matter. What is indisputable is that the *Theses* were quickly translated from Latin into German and, thanks to the new printing press, the translation was rapidly distributed across Germany (within two weeks) and Europe (within two months).

The Archbishop forwarded the *Theses* to Rome. Ironically, the Archbishop stood to benefit from the sale of indulgences not only because of his loyalty to the Pope, but in order to repay him for the dispensation the Pope had granted which entitled the Archbishop to hold more than one bishopric. (Mainz *and* Magdeburg)

Pope Leo X took time to study and respond to the Theses. The Dominican theologian Sylvester Mazzolini Prierias (1456-1523) drafted the heresy case against Luther for the Pope, then Leo ordered Luther to Rome. The Elector Frederick persuaded the Pope to have Luther examined at the meeting of the Imperial Diet in Augsburg. That was held in October 1518.

Prince Elector Frederick III

Thomas Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534) , Papal legate, arrived to conduct the examination. Luther informed Cajetan that he did not consider the papacy to be part of the biblical Church. Cajetan took this as an assault on the papacy, and sought the arrest of Luther. Elector Frederick protected him and Cajetan had no authority to carry out the arrest. Luther fled Augsburg under the cover of night.

Papal nuncio Karl von Miltitz (1490-1529) decided on a more conciliatory approach, as Luther himself repeatedly asserts. (Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, 1520) He had come to offer the Golden Rose of Virtue, a prize given to favored princes by the Pope, to Elector Frederick. In the evnt he met with Luther and negotiated a settlement whereby Luther would keep silent on indulgences but would not have to recant his

Theses; and Miltitz would bring Tetzel and the Archbishop of Mainz into compliance, stilling their claims against Luther. It was apparent that Miltiz thought the whole thing would blow over. Miltitz even implicated Tetzel in immoral activities and embezzlement. This effectively sidelined Tetzel, who died in July 1519, apparently under the stress.

In the meantime, Luther was invited to a debate with Johann Maier von Eck (1486-1543) in June and July 1519. Luther held that nothing in Matt 16.18 (the conferring of the keys to Peter) granted the Pope the right to interpret Scripture unilaterally. Popes and councils were not infallible, he held. Eck then likened Luther to Jan Hus, the Czech who had been burned at the stake for heresy in 1415.

In June 1520, Pope Leo issued the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, and threatened Luther with excommunication unless he recanted 41 sentences within 60 days. Luther then issued three essays, the most important perhaps being *On the Freedom of the Christian*, in late 1520. (Wace, 1883) He burned the papal bull at Wittenberg on 21 Dec 1520.

Luther was excommunicated by Leo on 3 Jan 1521 (in the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*).

The Diet of Worms was held from late January to late May 1521. Emperor Charles V (1500-1558; Emperor from 1519) presided. Elector Frederick obtained safe conduct for Luther, who appeared before the Diet on 18 April. Eck laid out numerous books on a table and asked Luther if these writings were his. He also asked if Luther stood behind them. Luther asserted his authorship but asked for time to consider his answer to the second question.


Emperor Charles V

On the next day, he gave his answer. He said his conscience was "captive to the Word of God," and that, unless he could be convinced by Scripture or by reason – NOT by the authority of the pope or councils – that he was in error, he was bound: "I cannot and will not recant." He ended with "May God help me." (The much repeated phrase "here I stand, I can do no other" seems to be a later interpolation.)

On 25 May, the Emperor declared Luther an outlaw, and ordered his arrest.

Elector Frederick had Luther intercepted on his way home and took him to Wartburg Castle at Eisenach. Luther regarded this as his "Patmos." Here, Luther translated the New Testament into German (from Latin). He also wrote several theological and polemic treatises. He renewed his attack on the Archbishop of Mainz, who finally halted the sale of indulgences.


Wartburg Castle

While at Wartburg, followers of Luther took radical measures to reform the Church. Some, under the leadership of Gabriel Zwilling, destroyed statues and instigated rebellion against authorities. Luther wrote *A Sincere Admonition* in Dec 1521 condemning such excesses.

Luther returned to Wittenberg and restored order to the city. But he expelled the radicals, especially the Zwickau Prophets who agitated in Luther's name for violent action. This incurred opposition from the radicals and Luther was fighting on two fronts. Things came to a head in the so-called Peasants' Revolt of 1524-25. Luther opposed radicals on three grounds: 1) they failed to obey Christ's injunction to "render to Caesar (the secular authority) what was due to Caesar; 2) these violent acts were against God's law as well as that of the Empire; 3) these acts were done by Christians against Christians, against the Lord's teaching on love. The Revolt came to an end on 15 May 1525 at the Battle of Frankenhausen. Radi-

calism subsequently found a home in the Anabaptist movement.


Katharina von Bora

While smuggling some nuns from a Cistercian convent in April 1523, he met and fell in love with Katharine von Bora (1499-1552), whom he married 13 June 1525. She was 26 years of age, he was 41. They moved into a home that was the gift of the new Elector, John, called the black cloister because it was a former monastery. Together they had six children – four surviving to adulthood – and "Katie" worked to help sustain the family by farming and taking in boarders.

Luther organized a new Church. At first he supported the election of pastors by congregations. But he soon instituted a supervisory body to assure sound doctrinal and experienced leadership. He wrote an order of service. And he wrote two catechisms. All this came about between 1525 and 1529. Because of his dependence on lector John, his organization in Saxony came to reflect control by the secular authority – not unlike that which would develop in England. The Elector visited churches as former bishops had done.

Luther was concerned not to move too rapidly or thoroughly in the reformation of the liturgy. He wrote a *German Mass* in 1526. Vestments, altars, candles etc., were optional. But he included the elevation of the host and chalice. He allowed freedom in the ceremonial of the liturgy. But his service included hymns and the singing of psalms in German. He also instituted weekday services built around the Catechism and simplified the baptismal and marriage services.

He was deeply distressed on his visitation in 1527 at the level of ignorance and indolence among the pastors. The common people, he said, know "nothing at all of Christian doctrine". (Luther, The Small Catechism) It was to address this situation that he wrote the Large and the Small Catechisms in 1529.

Luther published his translation of the New Testament in 1522. In 1534, he published his translation of the Bible. He had been assisted in the larger work by a number of collaborators. Ironically, after maintaining the importance of "the Scriptures alone" (sola scriptura), he took some liberties with the translation. For example, he inserted the word "alone" at Rom 3.28: "For we hold that a man is justified by faith *alone* apart from works of law." When criticized about this change, he said "It is my Testament and my translation, and it shall continue to be mine."

Luther composed many hymns, the most famous being "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" (Ein Fest Berg ist Unser Gott). He joined common tunes with doctrinal content, and saw hymns as a way to shape belief and growth in the Christian faith.

Perhaps the saddest episode in his life came when he gave pastoral advice to Philip of Hesse concerning the latter's intention to take a second wife – a case of clear bigamy. Philip thought he was entitled to do this on the basis of Scripture. Luther counseled him that he should do this in secret – not to draw attention to himself. Melanchthon was a witness to the marriage. But the issue did not remain secret and became a public scandal. When Philip threatened Luther that he would reveal his counsel, Luther advised him to deny the marriage by telling a "good and strong lie." Philip complied, but the whole episode came to reflect badly on Luther and many enemies exploited this.

Luther died in his home town of Eisleben while wrapping up some family business on 15 Feb 1548. He had preached on the 15th, a sermon that was characterized by his condemnation of the Jews. Luther's anti-Semitism would be a blight on his legacy for centuries to come, and would be a motivation among the Nazis who had little other use for his theology.