

6.7 Martin Luther's 95 Theses

Aim: Why did Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses shake the Roman Catholic world?

Background: Martin Luther was a German Monk and Roman Catholic priest whose opposition to church policies precipitated [started] the European Reformation. The Ninety-Five Theses were written in 1517 to protest against the sale of papal indulgences that were supposed to grant forgiveness for sins and help an individual or family members enter heaven. Luther argued that only God, not the church, could grant forgiveness and salvation. On the eve of All Saint's Day, October 31, 1517, Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses, written in Latin, on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg in Germany. He also gave a copy to the Roman Catholic Archbishop. The theses were printed and within months spread across Europe.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ninety-Five_Theses



Questions

1. Why did Martin Luther challenge the sale of papal indulgences?
2. Why were his ideas able to spread rapidly across Europe?
3. What does Luther believe is the only legitimate response to his theses?
4. Why would Luther's protest against the sale of indulgences shake the Roman Catholic world?

Excerpts from Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses

Source: <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/95theses.htm>

- (5) The pope has neither the will nor the power to remit any penalties beyond those imposed either at his own discretion or by canon law.
- (21) Those who preach indulgences are in error when they say that a man is absolved and saved from every penalty by the pope's indulgences.
- (24) The people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of relief from penalty.
- (27) There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of the purgatory immediately the money clinks in the bottom of the chest.
- (32) All those who believe themselves certain of their own salvation by means of letters of indulgence, will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.
- (36) Any Christian who is truly repentant enjoys plenary remission from penalty and guilt, and this is given him without letters of indulgence.
- (43) Christians should be taught that one who gives to the poor, or lends to the needy, does a better action than if he purchases indulgences.
- (44) By works of love, love grows and a man becomes a better man; whereas, by indulgences, he does not become a better man, but only escapes certain penalties.
- (62) The true treasure of the church is the Holy gospel of the glory and the grace of God.
- (79) It is blasphemy to say that the insignia of the cross with the papal arms are of equal value to the cross on which Christ died.
- (90) These questions are serious matters of conscience to the laity. To suppress them by force alone, and not to refute them by giving reasons, is to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies, and to make Christian people unhappy.