



The 95 Theses of Martin Luther

By Jim Elliff

On October 31st, 1517, Dr. Luther nailed the 95 theses on the Wittenberg castle church door. These points of discussion were immediately distributed across the German countryside and soon over the whole European continent. Martin Luther would develop his views further as time went on. Here he confronts the Pope over the selling of indulgences for the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Tetzel, an emissary of the Pope, was preaching that money given for the Basilica warranted a letter of pardon from the Pope, freeing a soul from Purgatory (a place for the purging of sins prior to admission to heaven, as taught in Catholic theology—but not in the Bible). This day marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Here is a sampling of the propositions Martin Luther presented:

1. Our Lord and master Jesus Christ, in saying 'Repent Ye, etc.,' meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance.
27. Those who assert that a soul straightway flies out (of purgatory) as a coin tinkles in the collection-box, are preaching an invention of man.
32. Those who think themselves sure of salvation through their letters of pardon will be damned forever along with their teachers.
37. Any true Christian, living or dead, partakes of all the benefits of Christ and the Church, which is the gift of God, even without a letter of pardon.
50. Christians must be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the preachers of indulgences he would rather have St. Peter's basilica reduced to ashes than built with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that the pope (as is his duty) would desire to give of his own substance to those poor men from many of whom certain sellers of pardons are extracting money: that to this end he would even, if need be, sell the basilica of Saint Peter.
52. Confidence in salvation through letters of indulgence is vain; and that, even if the commissary, nay, even if the pope himself should pledge his soul as a guarantee.
54. A wrong is done to the Word of God when in the same sermon an equal or a longer time is devoted to indulgences than to God's Word.
62. The true measure of the church is the sacrosanct Gospel of the glory and grace of God.

63. But this is deservedly most hated, since it makes the first last.

64. Whereas the treasure of indulgences is deservedly most popular, since it makes the last first.

65. Thus the Gospel treasures are nets, with which of old they fished for men of riches.

66. The treasures of indulgences are nets, with which they now fish for the riches of men.

67. Indulgences, according to the declarations of those who preach them, are the greatest graces; but 'greatest' is to be understood to refer to them as producers of revenue.

68. They are in fact of little account as compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.

76. We say, on the contrary, that papal pardons cannot take away the least of venial sins, as regards guilt.

79. It is blasphemy to say that the cross adorned with the papal arms is as effectual as the cross of Christ.

82. They ask: Why does not the pope empty purgatory on account of most holy charity and the great need of souls, the most righteous of causes, seeing that he redeems an infinite number of souls on account of sordid money, given for the erection of a basilica, which is a most trivial cause?

86. The pope's riches at this day far exceed the wealth of the richest millionaires. Cannot he therefore build one single basilica of St. Peter out of his own money, rather than out of the money of the faithful poor?

88. What great good would be gained by the Church if the pope were to do a hundred times a day what he does once a day: i.e. distribute these remissions and dispensations to any of the faithful?

90. To suppress these careful arguments of the laity merely by papal authority, instead of clearing them up by a reasoned reply, is to expose the Church and the pope to the ridicule of the enemy and to render Christians unhappy.

94. Christians are to be exhorted to endeavor to follow Christ, their head, through pains, deaths, and hells.

95. And so let them trust to enter heaven rather through many tribulations than through the false confidence of peace.