

## MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

### Topics

#### Life

Luther was a God-obsessed seeker of certainty and assurance in a time of social trauma and personal anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

He sensed guilt and dread in the face of an angry God. He had a stormy inner life.

He acted in a “premodern” world where everything on earth is part of a higher reality and where the end of the world is coming.

Prophetic confidence

Resisted Erasmus’s peaceful compromise

Dependable allies

Public profile

Luther as a monk

Luther’s journey to Rome

Lucas Cranach the Elder (d. 1553)

Indulgences

Ninety-five Theses (1517)

LibriVox, Ninety-five Theses

Philip Melanchthon (d. 1560)

Andreas Karlstadt (d. 1541)

Leipzig Debate (1519)

Diet of Worms (1521)

Wartburg

Luther Bible

Thomas Muntzer (d. 1525)

German Peasants’ War

Katharina von Bora

Erasmus (d. 1536)

Augsburg Confession (1530)

Luther and antisemitism

Any of Luther’s writings

#### Legacy

Developed human liberty and freedom of an informed conscience

Stressed obedience to authority

Rejected celibacy and affirmed marriage

Here to common people

State is to be ordered by law



*Ninety-five Theses, 1517*



Hans Holbein the Younger, *Luther as the Germanic Hercules*, 1519

<sup>1</sup> Martin Marty, *Martin Luther*, xii.

Promoted education and the arts,  
especially music  
Struck out at Jews who refused to  
convert  
Salvation by grace through faith in  
Christ  
Caused the Catholic Counter-  
Reformation



Von Werner, *Luther at the Diet of Worms*, 1877

Began the end of Catholic medieval  
universalism and kicked off the period of  
militant particularism, ideological diversity/pluralism, secularism, and expressive  
individualism, freedom of conscience, regionalism/nationalism, Catholic renewal  
Autonomous/secularised politics, obedience to lawful authorities with right of resistance,  
hymn singing; dogmatic purity/uniformity; tolerance and freedom of opinion, and pluralism;  
chaos of religious war; separation of religion and politics, church and state; freedom with  
responsibility/bound by Scripture; renewal of religion and faith as crucial for the individual  
and society; equality of all humans directly before God; living out faith in everyday  
experience; calling to holiness in church, family, and state; joining of the *vita contemplativa*  
and *vita activa*

**Influenced by:** Paul (Ro 1:17), Augustine of Hippo, John Wyclif, John Huss

Peter Lombard, *Sentences*

**Reacted against:** Aristotle, William of Ockham, Thomas Aquinas, Scholasticism, the  
Catholic church, Erasmus

**Influenced:** Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

### *Quotes*

“Since your most serene majesty and your highnesses require of me a simple, clear, and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the council, because it is clear that they have fallen into error and even into inconsistency with themselves. If, then, I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons, if I am not satisfied by the very text I have cited, and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God’s word, I neither can nor will retract anything; for it cannot be either safe or honest for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise.



God help me. Amen.”<sup>2</sup>

“If you are a preacher of mercy, do not preach an imaginary but the true mercy. If the mercy is true, you must therefore bear the true, not an imaginary sin. God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides. We, however, says Peter (2 Pe 3:13), are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where justice will reign. It suffices that through God’s glory we have recognized the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery thousands of times each day. Do you think such an exalted Lamb paid merely a small price with a meagre sacrifice for our sins? Pray hard for you are quite a sinner.”<sup>3</sup>

“Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbour needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.”<sup>4</sup>

“We here are convinced that the papacy is the seat of the true and incarnate Antichrist.”<sup>5</sup>

“Formulism, Pagan Popeism, and other Falsehood and corrupt Semblance had ruled long enough: and here once more was a man found who durst tell all men that God’s-world stood not on semblances but on realities; that Life was a truth, and not a lie! At bottom, as was said above, we are to consider Luther as a Prophet Idol-breaker; a bringer-back of men to reality. It is the function of great men and teachers. ... The Diet of Worms, Luther’s appearance there on the 17th of April, 1521, may be considered as the greatest scene in Modern European History; the point, indeed, from which the whole subsequent history of civilization takes its rise. ... English Puritanism, England and its Parliaments, Americas, and vast work these two centuries; French Revolution, Europe and its work everywhere at present: the germ of it all lay there: had Luther in that moment done other, it had all been otherwise!”<sup>6</sup>

“Martin Luther (1483–1546) nailed his *Ninety-five Theses* to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. To put this into historical perspective, we should remember that Leonardo da Vinci lived from 1452 to 1519. Thus, Luther’s *Theses* were set forth just two years before Leonardo’s death. Calvin was born in 1509, ten years before Leonardo’s death,

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms (1521).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther (1520).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*, 78-79.

and the year Leonardo died Luther had his disputation in Leipzig with Dr. Eck. Francis I, who in 1516 took Leonardo to France (where Leonardo died), is the same Francis I to whom Calvin (1509-1564) addressed his Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536. One must understand that these two things were happening almost simultaneously....”<sup>7</sup>

See quote on Luther in D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 7-8.

### ***Bibliography***

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<sup>7</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 80.

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*Film*



[Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer](#)

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