
Work to Spark the Reformation: Martin Luther King's Opposition to the Church Authority

One of the main issues that helped to spark the Reformation was Luther's opposition to the church authority of the time, mainly their sale of indulgences. Luther devoted himself to God, after praying for safety during a lightning storm, and his life soon after began to revolve around the church. As time went on, he realized the salvation that was being preached to him was impossible to achieve. He traveled to Rome and was appalled with the way the clergy acted, and how their focus was on power. He began an in-depth study of Scripture, to better understand their wrong doings, and what was really asked of him. The sale of church indulgences was one thing that did truly upset him, and he took action against it. Martin Luther was so adamantly opposed to the sale of indulgences because of his personal beliefs, based on the writings of previous reformers and his own in-depth study of Scripture, that the pope was condemning the Christian people and abusing his power; Luther's words, which were meant to reform the church, ignited the growing feelings of doubt among the common people and played a key role in beginning the Reformation.

During this time, the church used a variety of propaganda to appeal their causes to others. A caricature of John Tetzel, the famous indulgence preacher (Document B), is shown to glorify him as he sells indulgences to the poor. In the drawing he is up on a high horse, with a presumably white dove over his head, and other little birds around him. He is also carrying wheat, which symbolizes prosperity. The people running to him are pictured lower than he is, with much less decoration. The text in the picture includes the lines "As soon as gold in the basin rings, right then the soul to Heaven springs." This is to show people that the minute they pay the church either their soul, or the soul of a loved one, is redeemed. A picture drawn of Martin Luther tempting Christ (Document D) is used to show that Luther is to be associated with evil. In the painting, Martin Luther is shown with lizard feet and a tail; this shows that he is associated with the devil. He has a very stern look on his face as he holds a rock and talks with Christ. Luther is also dressed in all black, to show his darkness, and he and Christ are pointing in different directions. The pope is also depicted in the corner of the painting, on the side with Christ. Both of these documents are used to promote or defend the church. The caricature supporting indulgences is used to help the church show the worth of indulgences, and the painting of Martin Luther tempting Christ is used to show that since Luther has spoken against the church he has become evil. These documents have a biased point of view for the church; they help promote the things that help the church and condemn things, or people, that are seemingly against the church.

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Although the church had maintained power in Europe for many years, there were people who published works that did not speak highly of the church power, which led to problems in the countries. Martin Luther's 95 Theses (Document E) was posted on the Wittenberg Church door. These theses were written to show that the sale of indulgences were not really as glorified as the church made them seem, and also to show that the pope does not have the power he appears to be acting with. Statements five and six of the theses show that the pope does not have the power to remit penalties that he does not impose, and therefore he can not remit guilt. It goes on to say that no divine authority preaches that the minute you pay the church your soul is saved, and that God gives any Christian who is truly repentant remission from penalty. The church was appalled when these statements were published, and condemned Luther. Another man who published work that did not glorify the church was Erasmus. In his depiction of Pope Julius II's exclusion from Heaven (Document A), Julius has a conversation with his guardian angel, Genius, about why he can't open the gate to Heaven. It appears the Julius only brought one key; he brought the key of power, which works for the treasury, when he needed the key of knowledge, which Julius says he has never used it before because he never needed it. This shows the church's focus on power and money. Martin Luther's theses and Erasmus' depiction of Julius' exclusion from Heaven were both works that greatly upset the church. During the church's time of power, these published works did not speak well of the authority and caused problems throughout Europe.

One aspect that played a key role in spreading both works for the reformation and against it was the difference between the spreading of artistic works and written works. The Reformation became such an important movement because works like, Erasmus' Julius II's exclusion from Heaven (Document A), and Martin Luther's 95 Theses (Document E) were published and spread throughout Europe. Gutenberg's printing press made it very easy for publications to spread at a quicker pace than it took for people to see artwork. This gave the written work of reformers an advantage over the artwork of Christian support. The caricature of John Tetzl (Document B) and the portrayal of Martin Luther tempting Christ (Document D) are both works that are shown to help the church's causes, but they are pieces that cannot be published and spread at the rate of written work. With reformers printing and spreading their work many more people are exposed to their ideas, and when Luther's theses spread the Reformation grew. The difference between the mass, rapid spreading of the words of reformers, and the slow, local impacts of drawings and artwork done by, and for, the church is an important aspect of how the Reformation grew.

Based off an in-depth study of Scripture, Martin Luther believed the pope was condemning the Christian people by the sale of indulgences and abusing his power; and, although his words were only meant to change the church, his opinions and works played an important role in igniting the Reformation. During this time of conflict in Europe the church produced works that helped support their sales, and condemn those against it. On the other side of the reform, the

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people opposed to the church created their own publications and spread their beliefs and hopes of change throughout Europe. By utilizing the power of the printing press, the written words of reformers spread much quicker than the artwork of the church. The fact that Luther's 95 Theses was such a strong and convincing work, that was available to the people, allowed this opposition to the sale of indulgences to spark the Reformation.

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