

A STUDY OF THE

Protestant Reformation

1517 - 2017

The 500th Anniversary





Introduction: Part 5

When we left Luther in our last lecture, he was a novice in the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt engaging in the various stringent disciplines by which he might gain eternal life. After he completed his first year, he was ordained at the Cathedral Church of St. Mary in Erfurt on April 3, 1507, and performed his first mass, a traumatic experience for him as he contemplated his own unworthiness and questioned how a pigmy could stand before divine Majesty and how a transgressor could confront divine Holiness. Biographer Roland Bainton notes that “this second upheaval of the spirit set up in Luther an inner turmoil which was to end in the abandonment of the cowl (garment with a hood worn by monks), but not until after a long interval.”



Cathedral Church of St. Mary, Erfurt

Further Training and Lectures

- In the fall of 1508, Luther was sent to the Augustinian monastery at Wittenberg to continue his studies in theology and to lecture on Aristotle's *Ethics* (one semester).
- He received his Bachelor of the Bible in 1509 and returned to Erfurt.
- In November of 1510, he was sent on a mission to the head of the Augustinian order in Rome. At that time, Rome was a city of about 40,000 and Julius II was the pope.
- He was searching for religious satisfaction, but did not succeed. He was disappointed at finding secularism, formalism, religious indifference, and immorality among the Roman clergy.



Luther in Rome

Martin Luther “was climbing Pilate’s stairs on hands and knees repeating a *Pater Noster* for each one and kissing each step for good measure in the hope of delivering a soul from purgatory. Luther regretted that his own father and mother were not yet dead and in purgatory so that he might confer on them so signal a favor. Failing that, he had resolved to release Grandpa Heine. The stairs were climbed, the *Pater Nosters* were repeated, the steps were kissed. At the top Luther raised himself and exclaimed, not as legend would have it, ‘The just shall live by faith!’ – he was not yet that far advanced. What he said was, ‘Who knows whether it is so?’”

Scala Sancta (Holy Stairs)

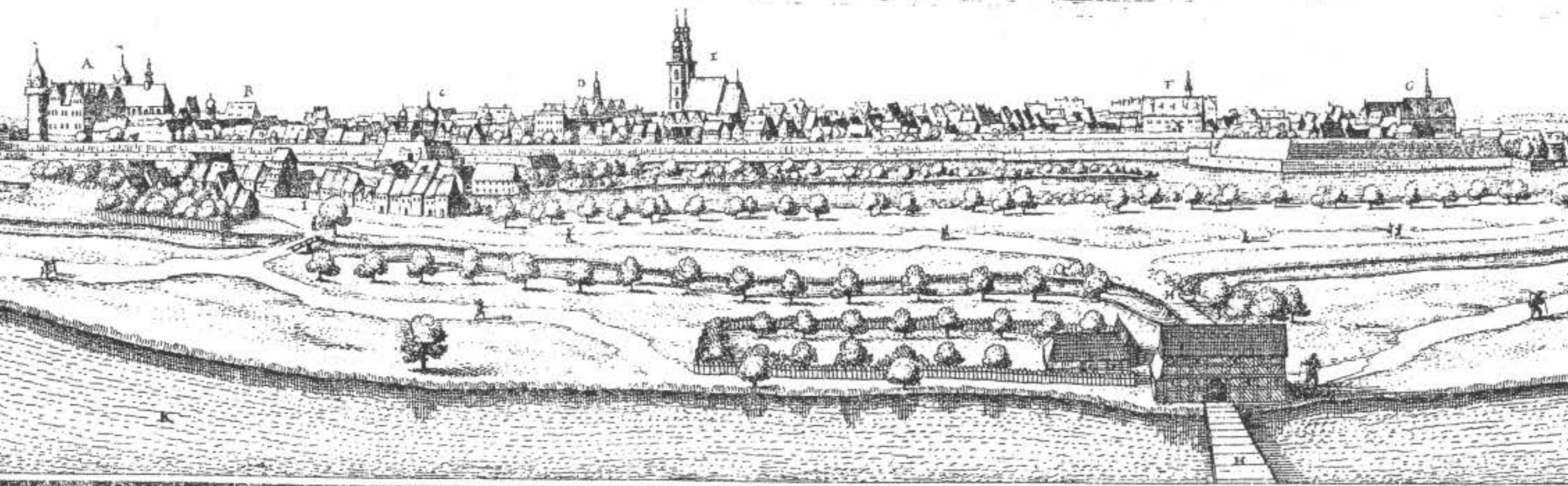


- Twenty-eight stairs in front of the Lateran in Rome.
- Supposedly the steps once stood in front of Pilate's palace, the *praetorium*.
- According to tradition, these were the steps which Jesus walked on when he was put on trial during Passion Week.
- It is believed that Helena, Constantine's mother, brought the steps to Rome in the 4th century.

Back to Wittenberg

- Luther returned from Rome to Erfurt.
- In early April, 1511, Staupitz again sent him to Wittenberg where he became subprior of the Augustinian monastery.
- He prepared himself for the degree of Doctor of Theology, which he received on October 18, 1512. Luther was 28 years old.
- He took Staupitz's place on the faculty at the University of Wittenberg and began to lecture on biblical literature, including the Psalms (began on August 1, 1513), Romans (1515), and Galatians (1516-1517).

Wittenberg



C. Elbethor.
D. Rathhaus.

E. Pfarrkirche.
F. Collegium.

G. Collegium Augusti.
H. Elbebrücken.

I. Vorstadt.
K. Elbefluß.

L. Fischer Vorstadt.
M. Vorstadt gegen Osten.

Justification by Faith Alone

- Luther stated that it was in the tower of the monastery at Wittenberg that he arrived at his illuminating interpretation of Romans 1:17 – “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”
- He called his discovery his entry into the “gates of paradise.”
- Luther believed that God imputes His righteousness to a believing sinner and makes man acceptable by His grace and mercy.
- He did not develop his conception of justification by faith alone solely in the quiet seclusion of his monastic cell, but in an active life as a professor, a monastic vicar, and a city preacher.

Luther's Growing Influence

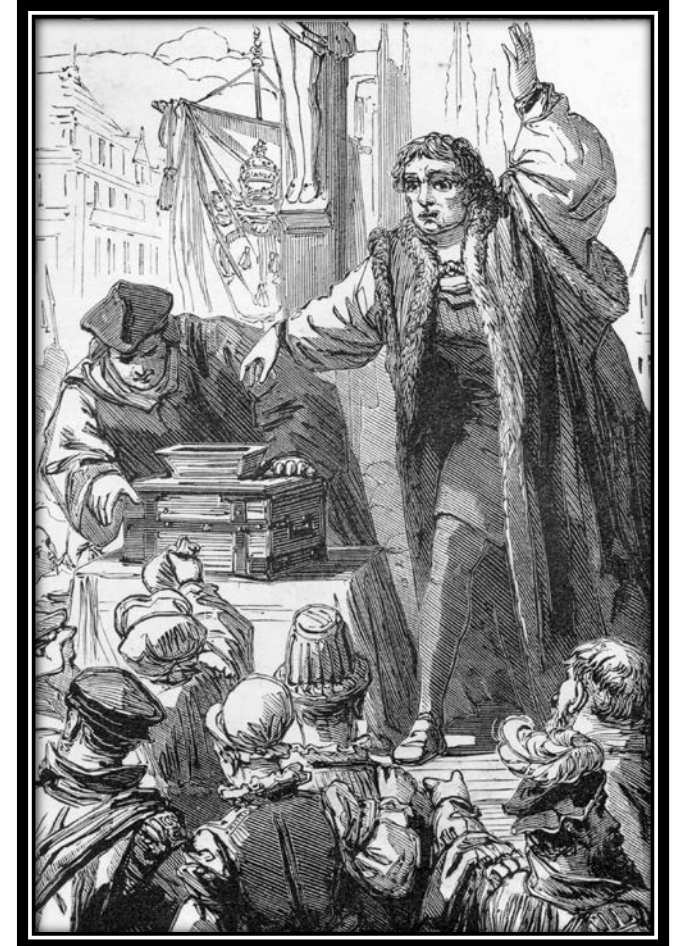
- In May, 1515, the Augustinian order elected him district vicar, placing him in charge of the ten, later eleven, monasteries in Thuringia and Meissen.
- The town council of Wittenberg invited him to preach at the City Church (Stadtkirche Wittenberg), the mother-church of the Protestant Reformation, to substitute for the regular pastor who was ill; he remained in this position for the rest of his life.



Stadtkirche
City Church of Wittenberg

The Indulgence Controversy

- The particular indulgence that aroused Luther's wrath: the Jubilee Indulgence.
- This indulgence was inaugurated to obtain funds for rebuilding the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome.
- Johann Tetzel (d. 1519) assumed the role of indulgence preacher and was armed with the right to prohibit all religious functions that might interfere with his business.





What Is An Indulgence?

- From the Latin, **indulgeo**, v., to be kind or tender; be kind or lenient to; grant; give way to; accede to.
- **Indulgence**, *n.*, “a remission of the punishment which is still due to sin after sacramental absolution, this remission being valid in the court of conscience and before God, and being made by an application of the treasure of the Church on the part of a lawful superior” (OED).
- “Spare merit that was kept in the church’s treasury, to which only the pope had the keys. The pope could give a gift of merit (an indulgence) to any soul he deemed worthy, fast-tracking that soul’s path through purgatory, or even leap-frogging purgatory altogether” (Reeves).



What Is An Indulgence?

“The Church, while taking an individualistic view of sin, takes a corporate view of goodness. Sins must be accounted for one by one, but goodness can be pooled; and there is something to pool because the saints, the Blessed Virgin, and the Son of God were better than they needed to be for their own salvation. Christ in particular, being both sinless and God, is possessed of an unbounded store. These superfluous merits of the righteous constitute a treasury which is transferable to those whose accounts are in arrears. The transfer is effected through the Church and, particularly, through the pope, to whom as the successor of St. Peter have been committed the keys to bind and loose. Such a transfer of credit was called an indulgence.”



What the Indulgences Promised

1. Plenary remission of sin as well as punishment of sin in purgatory, after absolution by a confessor.
2. Assure the purchasers and their departed relatives eternal participation in the merits of the saints of the Church without confession.
3. Obtain for the dead in purgatory plenary remission of all sins without confession or contrition (the usual provisions of the sacrament of penance).



The Primary Question About Indulgences

- Could the pope mitigate the pangs of purgatory?
- The efficacy of indulgences extended to purgatory for the benefit of the living and the dead.
- “In the case of those already dead and in purgatory, the sum of whose wickedness was complete and known, an immediate release could be offered. Some bulls of indulgence went still further and applied not merely to reduction of penalty but even to the forgiveness of sins. They offered a plenary remission and reconciliation with the Most High” (Bainton).
- Benefits could be derived by viewing the relics of the saints.



Indulgences in Wittenberg

- Wittenberg (the Rome of Germany) was a depository of sacred relics.
- Frederick the Wise's collection: genuine thorn from the crown of Christ; one tooth of St. Jerome; Our Lady, four hairs; three pieces of her cloak, four from her veil sprinkled with the blood of Christ; one piece from Jesus' swaddling clothes; thirteen from his crib; one piece of gold brought by the Wise Men; three of myrrh; one strand of Jesus' beard; one of the nails driven through his hands; one piece of bread eaten at the Last Supper, etc.
- By 1520 the collection had mounted to 19,013 bones. Those who viewed them would have 1,902,202 years reduced in purgatory.

The Purpose of Indulgences

“Indulgences served not merely to dispense the merits of the saints but also to raise revenues. They were the bingo of the sixteenth century.”



Building St. Peter's Basilica

“When Nicholas V (1447-1455) returned the papacy to Rome after Avignon, he made the Vatican the permanent seat of the Church for the first time and, soon after, he began to rebuild the hallowed, old basilica of St. Peter, erected by Constantine in A.D. 326. After Nicholas died, the project languished until the new century, when Julius II (1503-1512) was consecrated pope. During the interim years, Columbus discovered a New World, Lorenzo de' Medici died in Florence, Michelangelo, Raphael, Magellan, Copernicus, and Martin Luther were born, and Leonardo painted *The Last Supper*” (R.A. Scott).

Tickets to Paradise

“When Leo had exhausted the wealth of the Church, he hawked indulgences like tickets to paradise.”

R.A. Scott, *Basilica: The Splendor and the Scandal*



Portrait of Pope Leo X with Two Cardinals
by Raphael
Uffizi Gallery of Florence

How the Indulgence Worked

- Albert of Brandenburg had to pay the pope for holding three sees at once (Halberstadt, Magdeburg, and Mainz).
- Leo X needed funds to complete the building of St. Peter's, which had been commenced by Julius II.
- The German banking house of Fugger negotiated with Albert and the pope. Indulgences were issued in order to repay the debts, and the Fuggers supervised the collection.
- Albert had to pay money down before he could secure his appointment, so he borrowed money from the Fuggers.



How the Indulgence Worked

- So Albert could reimburse himself, Leo X granted him the privilege of dispensing an indulgence in his territories for the period of eight years. Half would go to the pope for building St. Peter's; the other half would go to reimburse the Fuggers.
- "The instructions declared that a plenary indulgence had been issued by His Holiness Pope Leo X to defray the expenses of remedying the sad state of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul and the innumerable martyrs and saints whose bones lay moldering, subject to constant desecration from rain and hail. Subscribers would enjoy a plenary and perfect remission of all sins. They would be restored to the state of innocence which they enjoyed in baptism and would be relieved of all the pains of purgatory" (Bainton).

Johann Tetzel

- The proclamation of the indulgence was entrusted to Tetzel was a German, Dominican friar and prior of the monastery at Leipzig.
- He sold indulgences at Jüterbock near Wittenberg, just beyond the borders of Saxony and was subcommissary of the regions of Magdeburg and Halberstadt.
- “He himself assumed the role of indulgence preacher, accompanied by Fugger agents and armed with the right to prohibit all religious functions that might interfere with his business.”



Johann Tetzel

c. 1465-1519



Johannes Tetzel
geboren am 1465
in diesem Hause
Dienstadtmeister
Königlicher Hofkammer
Königlicher Hofkammer
Königlicher Hofkammer
Königlicher Hofkammer

19

8

Birthplace of Johann Tetzel, 1465, in Pirna

Tetzel's Promise

“As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,
The soul from purgatory springs.”

“Place your penny on the drum,
The pearly gates open and in strolls mum.”



Friar Johann Tetzel Selling Indulgences

by J.D.L. Franz Wagner (German, 1810-1864)

The Ninety-Five Theses

- Luther felt impelled to make an issue of the abuse of indulgences.
- He prepared his Ninety-Five Theses for academic discussion and debate.
- On October 31, 1517 (500 years ago), the eve of All Saints' Day, Luther nailed these theses on the door of the Castle Church, the official bulletin board of the university.
- They were written in Latin, not German (indicating that he was not trying to arouse the public).
- The Theses show Luther's respect for the sacraments, institutions, and offices of the Church.

The Ninety-Five Theses

- He used a calm, academic style in attacking the worst features of the traffic.
- The climax of the Theses was his vigorous criticism of the pope for not granting indulgences gratis, if he really had the power; and for extracting money from the poor for rebuilding St. Peter's instead of using his own immense wealth.
- The sale of indulgences was leading people into a false security with respect to salvation.
- The Ninety-Five Theses were soon translated into German, printed, and distributed widely.

Selections From the Ninety-Five Theses

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.
6. The pope himself cannot remit guilt, but only declare and confirm that it has been remitted by God; or, at most, he can remit it in cases reserved to his discretion. Except for these cases, the guilt remains untouched.
8. The penitential canons apply only to men who are still alive, and, according to the canons themselves, none applies to the dead.
9. It is a wrongful act, due to ignorance, when priests retain the canonical penalties on the dead in purgatory.

Selections From the Ninety-Five Theses

- 21. Hence 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.
- 27. There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of purgatory immediately the money clinks in the bottom of the chest.
- 28. It is certainly possible that when the money clinks in the bottom of the chest avarice and greed increase; but when the church offers intercession, all depends on the will of God.
- 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.

Selections From the Ninety-Five Theses

- 36. Any Christian whatsoever, who is truly repentant, enjoys plenary remission from penalty and guilt, and this is given him without letters of indulgence.
- 50. Christians should be taught that, if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence-preachers, he would rather the church of St. Peter were reduced to ashes than be built with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.
- 53. Those are enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid the word of God to be preached at all in some churches, in order that indulgences may be preached in others.

Selections From the Ninety-Five Theses

82. They ask, e.g.: Why does not the pope liberate everyone from purgatory for the sake of love (a most holy thing) and because of the supreme necessity of their souls? This would be morally the best of all reasons. Meanwhile he redeems innumerable souls for money, a most perishable thing, with which to build St. Peter's church, a very minor purpose.
86. Since the pope's income today is larger than that of the wealthiest of wealthy men, why does he not build this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of indigent believers?





St. Peter's

- The original St. Peter's was four hundred feet long by two hundred feet wide, with a large atrium, five columned aisles, and a timber roof.
- St. Peter's today covers a total area of 227,070 square feet, more than five acres.
- The interior of the Basilica is 451 feet wide by 613 feet long – almost 1/8 of a mile.
- The columns and pilasters are more than 90 feet high.
- The diameter of the dome is 137.7 feet.
- St. Peter's Square is 1,115 feet long by 650 feet wide.



St. Peter's

- Building St. Peter's spanned thirty papacies.
- Construction began on St. Peter's on April 18, 1506, and it was consecrated on November 18, 1626 – about 120 years later.
- The dome, conceived in the fall of 1505, was completed 85 years later.
- “His (Michelangelo's) true last will and testament was the fifteen-foot scale model of the dome of St. Peter's, fashioned from lime-wood on a ratio of 1:15. Michelangelo had built the large model in his final years so that, in the event of his death, the Basilica dome would be completed as he had intended.”



Final Thoughts From Tetzel

“So why are you standing about idly? Run, all of you, for the salvation of your souls. Be quick and concerned about redemption as about the temporal goods you doggedly pursue from day till night. ‘Seek ye the Lord while he may be found....while he is near’ (Is. 55:6); work, as John says, ‘while it is day,’ for ‘the night cometh when no man can work’ (John 9:4). – Do you not hear the voices of your dead parents and other people, screaming and saying: ‘Have pity on me, have pity on me...for the hand of God hath touched me.’ (Job 19:21)? ‘We are suffering severe punishments and pain, from which you could rescue us with a few alms, if only you would.’ Open your ears, because the father is calling to the son and the mother to the daughter.”