

LUTHER ON TRIAL



LUTHER'S SEAL

LUTHER IS EXCOMMUNICATED

About a year after nailing the 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, Luther became involved in a debate with John Eck, a theologian of the Pope. In this debate Eck succeeded in pushing Luther to admit that councils and Popes have erred. To many this debate was a victory for John Eck, for Rome now considered Luther not just a radical monk, but a heretic. Luther however saw this debate as a turning point in his relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. He now realized the gulf that stood between his theology and that of the Pope.

Luther returned from the Leipzig Debate more ambitious for work than ever. Now that the bars were down, books, pamphlets, sermons, tracts, and letters poured from his pen in a torrent so that all the world could know what the quarrel was about. Wherever he turned his attention, his new ideas revealed lost treasures or showed how far the Roman Catholic Church had strayed from the New Testament.

While Luther was busy at work, so were his adversaries. In May, 1520, a **bull** or papal decree was issued condemning 41 of Luther's statements. Luther himself was given until December 10, 60 days to submit or be excommunicated. At 10 a.m. on that memorable day, a group of professors and students from the university gathered outside Wittenberg's Elster Gate. A fire was started. Copies of church law and other books by Luther's enemies were thrown into the flames. Then, praying and trembling, Luther stepped to the fire and tossed in a little book. Only a few realized at the time that this was a copy of the papal bull. News of this incident spread throughout Europe. Churchmen were horrified and denounced Luther while others cheered him loudly.



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Frederick the Wise was ruler of the province in which Luther lived, but Charles V was the Emperor over all of Germany. Charles V was a stern Catholic and favored the practice of punishment for heretics. Pope Leo asked Charles to have Luther appear before the Great Council about to meet in Worms in April, 1521. Although the Emperor promised Luther safe travel to and from the Council, Luther's friends, fearing for his life, advised him not to attend. Luther felt obligated to appear, and as he stood before the awesome group, his questioner pointed to Luther's writings strewn on a table. He asked Luther if he would take back what he had written. After a day of reflection, Luther answered that unless the council could prove from the Bible that he was

wrong, his conscience would not permit him to take back what he believed to be true. He then added these well-known words, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen."

LUTHER AT THE WARTBURG

The mighty men at the council were astonished at Luther's courage. He was permitted to leave Worms, but he was placed under a ban which meant that no one was allowed to give him lodging or food. On his way home, he was surrounded by a band of horsemen who carried him off to the Wartburg Castle. They were not enemies, but friends who under the orders of Frederick the Wise placed Luther in a castle for safe-keeping. Luther made wise use of his time at the Wartburg, translating the New Testament into the German language.

For ten months Luther stayed at the Wartburg. During his stay dreadful things were happening back in Wittenberg. Protestors preached that priests, monks and nuns should marry. Vestments at services were changed or discarded. Meat was eaten on fast days. Luther's former colleague, Carlstadt, went so far as to condemn images, pictures, statues, and even music and organs in churches. Soon riots broke out and mobs overturned church altars, smashed pictures and disfigured gravestones. Frederick the Wise was frightened and issued instructions to the university that this must stop.

Luther returned in early March, 1522. He preached daily on the problems of the people and begged to restore order and moderation in Wittenberg. Luther realized that although changes had to be made, they must be made in the light of God's Word. His argument was not with pictures and robes, but with praying to saints, purgatory, relics, holy water and prayers for the dead.

THE LARGE AND SMALL CATECHISMS

One year later, Luther visited a number of churches in Saxony. He was dismayed at what he found. Everywhere people were sunk in superstition and ignorance. They seemed to have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine. They could not recite the Lord's Prayer or the Ten Commandments. And many of the pastors were ignorant and incompetent teachers.

To meet this need, Luther wrote his two catechisms. The larger edition appeared first and was intended for pastors and

adults. Parts of it were read to congregations, and pastors used it to help them prepare for sermons. Following the Large Catechism, Luther wrote the Small Catechism which was designed for fathers to teach their children. Here the Christian faith was explained in clear and simple language.

Other changes also began to slowly take place. Luther prepared several booklets about worship. Soon the Lutheran Church began to develop its own forms of worship different from those of the Catholic Church. German also became the language spoken at all worship services. In the Roman Catholic Church, most of the mass had been monopolized by the priests and the choir. Now the people could actively participate in the worship service. Also, a new emphasis was placed on preaching. In the medieval church the ceremony of the mass had become more important than the sermon. What little preaching was done was often poor and ill-prepared. Luther made the preaching of the Word central to the worship service. To assist preachers in better preparing sermons, he wrote sermon books which were used throughout Europe. No longer were the sermons about saints, popes and the Virgin Mary. Now the entire service was Christ-centered.

Another change was the practice of communion "in both kinds". The common people began to receive both the bread and the wine at communion.



EARLY EDITION OF GERMAN BIBLE

In the Roman Church most of the singing was done by the priest or a small choir. Luther's new order of worship called for active participation by the congregation. And to help in this area, Luther published a hymn book in 1524. It contained eight hymns, set to music, four of which Luther himself composed. The first hymn that he penned was "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice". Later on hymns appeared for the festive seasons, but above all towers the song of battle and triumph, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God".

Especially wonderful was the effect produced by Luther's hymns. The people never wearied of singing them. Luther's enemies complained that his hymns mislead more souls than all his writings and sermons.

HIS STORY

Luther was wrongly accused of preaching false doctrine. What can heresy do to one's faith? (2 Timothy 2:18)

What type of person teaches false doctrines? (1 Timothy 6:3,4) _____

What does Paul tell us to do with those who teach falsely? (Romans 16:17) _____

Martin Luther loved music. What should be our attitude toward music? (Colossians 3:16)

What type of song should we sing? (Psalm 98:4,5) _____

What should we do when we are happy? (James 5:13) _____

What unbelievable sound will be heard in heaven? (Revelation 5:11-13) _____

TO THINK ABOUT

What invention helped Luther spread his writings? What new inventions today can help spread the gospel?

Can you think of other times in history when a revolution went too far?

Why did Luther need to write the Small Catechism for fathers to teach their children?

How much of the Bible should fathers teach their children today?

Does it take a special type of person to rebuke a famous individual as did Luther with Eck or the Pope? Could you?

What are some differences between our worship service and other protestant churches?

If you were to make changes in our worship services today, what would it be?