

# LUTHER LEADS THE REFORMATION

**SETTING THE STAGE**  
By the tenth century, the Roman Catholic Church had come to dominate/control religious life in Northern and Western Europe. However, the Church had not won universal/complete approval. Over the centuries, many people criticized its practices. They felt that Church leaders were too interested in worldly pursuits/wants, such as gaining wealth and political power. Even though the Church made some reforms/changes during the Middle Ages, people continued to criticize it. Prompted by the actions of one man, that criticism would lead to rebellion.

See me for an envelope to complete the chart on your handout.

## Causes of the Reformation

By 1500, additional forces weakened the Church. The Renaissance emphasis on the secular and the individual challenged Church authority. The printing press spread these secular ideas. In addition, some rulers began to challenge the Church's political power. In Germany, which was divided into many competing states, it was difficult for the pope or the emperor to impose central authority. Finally, northern merchants resented paying church taxes to Rome. Spurred/started by these social, political, and economic forces, a new movement for religious reform began in Germany. It then swept much of Europe.

## Criticisms of the Catholic Church

Critics of the Church claimed that its leaders were corrupt. The popes who ruled during the Renaissance patronized the arts, spent extravagantly on personal pleasure, and fought wars. Pope Alexander VI, for example, admitted that he had fathered several children. Many popes were too busy pursuing secular ones to have much time for spiritual duties/jobs.

The lower clergy had problems as well. Many priests and monks were so poorly educated that they could scarcely read, let alone teach people. Others broke their priestly vows by marrying, and some drank to excess or gambled.

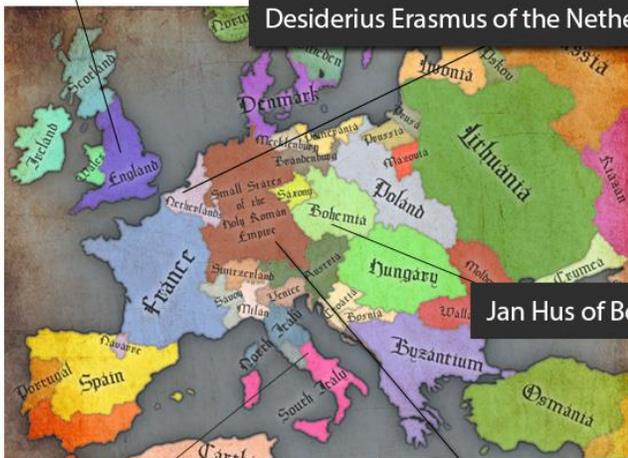
## Early Calls for Reform

Influenced by reformers, people had come to expect higher standards of conduct from priests and church leaders. In the late 1300s and early 1400s, John Wycliffe of England and Jan Hus of Bohemia had advocated/fought for Church reform. They denied that the pope had the right to worldly power. They also taught that the Bible had more authority than Church leaders did. In the 1500s, Christian humanists like Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More added their voices to the chorus/group of criticism. In addition, many Europeans were reading religious works and forming their own opinions about the Church. The atmosphere in Europe was ripe/ready for reform by the early 1500s.

### People of the Reformation

John Wycliff and Thomas More  
of England

Desiderius Erasmus of the Netherlands



Jan Hus of Bohemia

Pope Leo X of Italy

Martin Luther and  
Johann Tetzel of Germany

*People from all over were involved in the changing of the Catholic Church.*

## Luther Challenges the Church

Martin Luther's parents wanted him to be a lawyer. Instead, he became a monk and a teacher. From 1512 until his death, he taught scripture/*Bible* at the University of Wittenberg in the German state of Saxony. All he wanted was to be a good Christian, not to lead a religious revolution.

### The 95 Theses

In 1517, Luther decided to take a public stand against the actions of a friar named Johann Tetzel. Tetzel was raising money to rebuild St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. He did this by selling indulgences. An **indulgence** was a pardon. It released a sinner from performing the penalty that a priest imposed for sins. Indulgences were not supposed to affect God's right to judge. Unfortunately, Tetzel gave people the impression that by buying indulgences, they could buy their way into heaven.

Luther was troubled by Tetzel's tactics. In response, he wrote 95 Theses, or formal statements, attacking the "pardon-merchants." On October 31, 1517, he posted these statements on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg and invited other scholars to debate him. Someone copied Luther's words and took them to a printer. Quickly, Luther's name became known all over Germany. His actions began the **Reformation**, a movement for religious reform. It led to the founding/beginning of Christian churches that did not accept the pope's authority/control.

Click here to learn more about Pope Leo X [http://www.history-history.com/uploads/7/8/5/7/7857164/biography\\_of\\_pope\\_leo\\_x.pdf](http://www.history-history.com/uploads/7/8/5/7/7857164/biography_of_pope_leo_x.pdf)

Click here to learn more about Johann Tetzel [http://www.history-history.com/uploads/7/8/5/7/7857164/biography\\_of\\_johann\\_tetzel.pdf](http://www.history-history.com/uploads/7/8/5/7/7857164/biography_of_johann_tetzel.pdf)

# Words of the Reformation

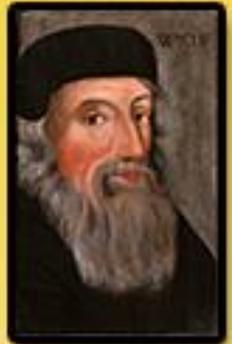


*"Seek the truth. Listen to the truth. Teach the truth. Teach the truth. Love the truth. Abide by the truth. And defend the truth unto death."*

*-Jan Hus*

*"Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation, and that without faith it is impossible to please God; that the merit of Christ is able, by itself, to redeem all mankind from hell, and that this sufficiency is to be understood without any other cause concurring."*

*- John Wycliffe*



*"By burning Luther's books you may rid your bookshelves of him, but you will not rid men's minds of him."*

*-Desiderius Erasmus*



## Luther's Teachings

Soon Luther went beyond criticizing indulgences. He wanted full reform/change of the Church. His teachings rested on three main ideas:

- People could win salvation only by faith in God's gift of forgiveness. The Church taught that faith and "good works" were needed for salvation.
- All Church teachings should be clearly based on the words of the Bible. Both the pope and Church traditions were false authorities.
- All people with faith were equal. Therefore, people did not need priests to interpret the Bible for them.

## SECTION SUMMARY

### ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING Answer this question at the bottom of your worksheet

Do you think Martin Luther was right to challenge the Catholic Church based on what was historically happening at the time? Why do you feel this way? Give 3 pieces of supporting evidence to back up your answer. You may cite and remember to elaborate as well.