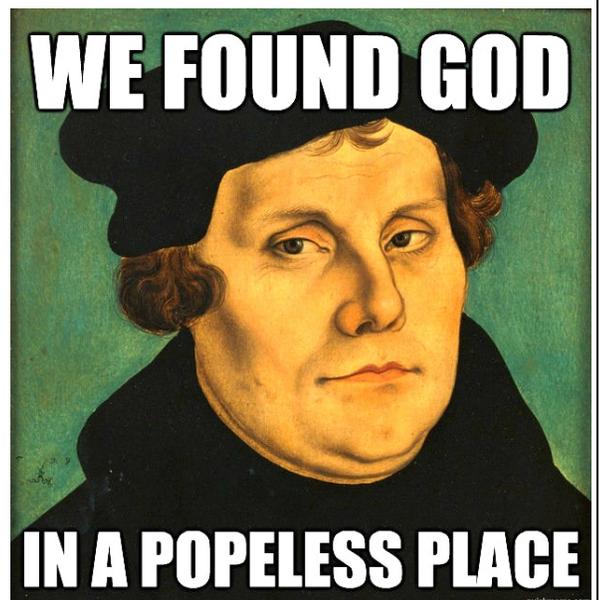


DOC 1: Luther Challenges the Church

Here at Crash Course, we don't like to get too into, like, great man history, but the Reformation really was initiated and shaped by one man, Martin Luther... Luther [was inspired by a teaching he found in the Bible, in] St. Paul's epistles, specifically... one line that said, "The just shall live by faith." In other words, salvation (acceptance into heaven) comes through faith, not good works, not through prayer or fasting or vigils or pilgrimages or relics or giving to the poor, or the sacraments, or any action that a person can take. We can't ever be good enough through our actions to merit (deserve) salvation, we can only have faith, in Latin, *sola fide*, only faith.

So Martin Luther's new interpretation of *sola fide* grew into a full-scale conflict with the Catholic Church, when a friar named Johann Tetzel came to Wittenberg selling indulgences. An indulgence was a donation to the church that came with a promise from the Pope to reduce a sinner's time in purgatory... Luther felt like that wasn't the sort of thing that, you know, should be for sale. The price of this whole-life-complete-forgiveness-of-any-horrible-sins certificate, by the way, was three marks, probably about half a year's wages for a [poor] laborer. So, Luther didn't like seeing his parishioners handing over money that they didn't have for a scrap of paper that he believed to be meaningless, so in response, he wrote 95 theses against indulgences and then dramatically nailed them to the church door for all to see on October 31st, 1517, or else he mailed them to the archbishop or possibly both, we don't actually know.

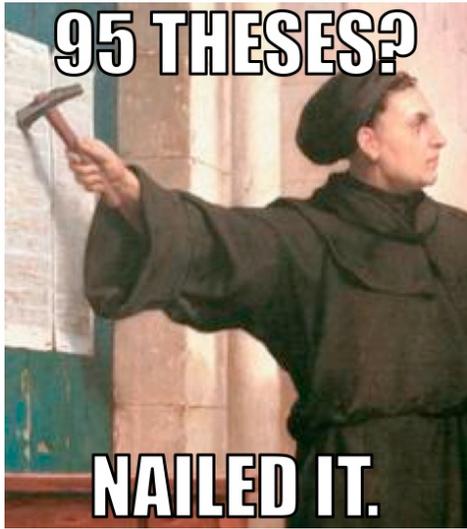
This led to a series of debates with other men of the cloth (Catholic clergy), during which Luther's positions became increasingly radical (away from the norm). Starting from the statement that Christians were saved only through faith and the grace of God, for instance, Luther then upped the ante (went further), saying that the church's rituals didn't have the power to save souls, and then he argued that far from being infallible (incapable of mistakes), the church and the Pope made errors all the time. That was a pretty bold thing to say, and then it got even more dramatic, when Luther ultimately denied that the church and the officers (clergy) of it had any spiritual powers. He said that the priesthood was a human invention and that individual Christians didn't even need priests to receive the grace of God, instead, Luther described a "Priesthood of all believers." So, this had gone from a call for reforming indulgences to a revolution.



Source: "Luther and the Protestant Reformation," John Green, *Crash Course World History*

DOC 2: Luther Goes Viral

The Ninety-Five Theses were points that Luther wanted to have a debate about at the university, and the church door was the notice board for the university, and so that was



how you said “I want to have a debate about these things.” And what Luther was really annoyed about was that there was a traveling salesman of indulgences (and these were sort of “get out of purgatory free” tickets) called Johann Tetzel, and he was selling them. And when Luther, who was a clergyman, had people coming to him for confession, they were saying well I don’t need to feel bad about [my sins] because I’ve bought an indulgence. And [Luther] was outraged at this.

His plan was not to split the Church, which is what ended up happening in the Reformation. [Rather, the selling of indulgences] was a signal to him that the Church needed to be reformed and that this sort of thing ought to be talked about. So he wrote the Theses in Latin and said lets have a debate about it. Copies of the Theses were published, probably with his approval, by his friends in three different towns in Germany... and they spread very very quickly. And then other people translated them into German and then those translations also spread very quickly, and it was said at the time that the Theses were known throughout Germany within two weeks and throughout Europe within a month. And so Luther realized that the sharing of these printed pamphlets could spread information very quickly. And so he wrote his next pamphlet in March 1518, [this time in German rather than in Latin so that it could be read by all], deliberately expecting it to spread... and sure enough it did.

And so that’s why I think there’s this analogy with social media, because he didn’t have to arrange for it to be printed all around Germany. All that happened was he gave a copy to a friendly printer in Wittenberg, no money changed hands, the pamphlet was immediately seized upon when it became available, people took it to other towns, discussed it with their friends, talked about it in taverns and marketplaces, preachers heard about it, and so his ideas spread along these existing social networks, and that’s why I think there’s this very strong analogy with social media today.

...Preaching was a very big part of this. Luther was a great preacher, and those who were sympathetic to his views were also preachers, and they could reach hundreds of people at once. But very often they were inspired by his writings, so in effect his ideas would travel in the form of the printed word, to another town, and then a preacher would disseminate them more widely using the spoken word.

Source: “How Luther Went Viral: Social Media in the 16th Century,” Tom Standage, *The Economist*

DOC 3: From the 95 Theses of Martin Luther, 1517

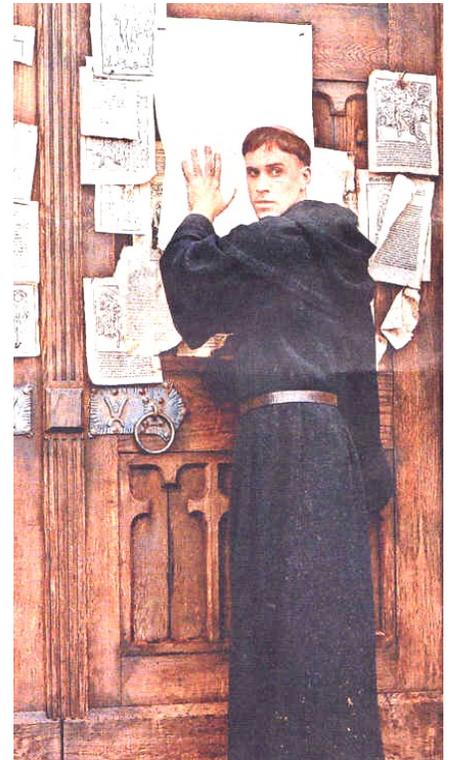
21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved...

36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission (forgiveness) of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon (indulgences)...

37. Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon (indulgences)...

43. Christians [should] be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons (indulgences)...

86. Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?



DOC 4: The Style of Luther

He is an incredible writer. He uses earthy, ordinary language, he's just fun to read out loud, he's sarcastic, he's witty (funny), he's profound (meaningful), he's a great comforter. If you get attacked by Luther, you're just torn up one side and down the other.

Source: Mark Edwards, President Emeritus, St. Olaf College, *Reluctant Revolutionary*

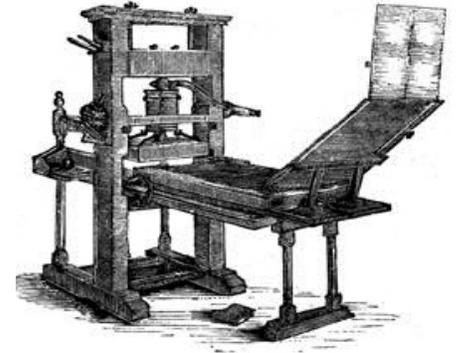
DOC 5: Revolutionary Rhetoric

One of the great themes of this appeal [of Luther] is that it is ordinary people, ordinary Christians, Not the priests, ordinary Christians, that have a God-given role to play in the running of the church... You could say that these [writings] are a revolutionary manifesto (declaration), not just for the church, but also for society as well. Luther is saying that ordinary Christians can make a difference, and once people start believing that, then the world can never be the same again.

Source: Alister McGrath, Oxford University, *Reluctant Revolutionary*

DOC 6: The Miracle of Printing

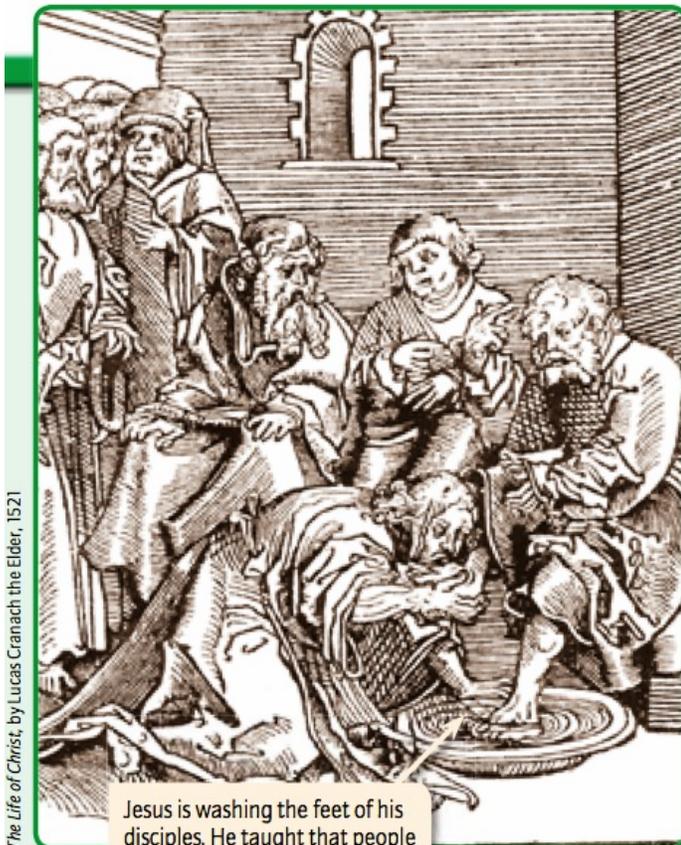
For movements to spread their ideas need to spread, and for Luther it was providential (miraculous) that a means of disseminating these ideas had suddenly become available through the printing press. I think in our own day and age we are very much aware of how much things have been changed by the Internet. What the internet is to our day printing was to Luther's day. It meant that ideas could travel. They could not be stopped.



Source: Alister McGrath, Oxford University, *Reluctant Revolutionary*

DOC 7: Woodcut Memes

Woodcuts were cheap to produce and easy to print, and people did not have to be able to read to understand them. The two woodcuts here, made in 1521, attack Pope Leo X by contrasting his personality with that of Jesus in order to suggest that the Church had rejected the message and example of Jesus.



The Life of Christ, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1521

Jesus is washing the feet of his disciples. He taught that people should serve others and not put themselves above others.



The Pope as the Antichrist, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1521

The pope has visiting world leaders kiss his feet. He raises himself above others and has them serve him.