

An Outline Chronology of the Events Surrounding the Beginning of the Reformation

A. Prehistory

Jan 27, 1343 - Papal bull Unigenitus (Dz 1025-27) states that indulgences apply the treasury of merits of Christ and the saints.

Jan 18, 1460 - Papal bull Exsecrabilis (Dz 1375) condemns appeal from pope to council

Aug 3, 1476 - Papal bull Salvator noster (Dz 1398) gives papal sanction to application of indulgences to those in purgatory. Following decades see marked increase in indulgence campaigns.

November 10, 1483 - Birth of Luther, Eisleben, Germany

July 17, 1505 - Luther joins Augustinian Hermits in Erfurt

1507 - Pope Julius II declares indulgence for funds contributed to building new St. Peter's in Rome. Renewed in 1513 by Pope Leo X.

Summer, 1511 - Luther transferred to Wittenberg

1514 - Albrecht, archbishop of Magdeburg and administrator of diocese of Halberstadt (age 23; younger brother of the Elector of Brandenburg), also becomes archbishop of Mainz; must borrow 21,000 ducats to pay various fees. Authorized to keep 50% of income from St. Peter's indulgence campaign in his territories.

B. The Indulgence Controversy

1517

Jan 22 - Johannes Tetzel commissioned to preach St Peter's indulgence in province of Magdeburg

April 10 - Tetzel preaches indulgence in Jüterbog, close to Wittenberg. (St. Peter's indulgence not preached in Electoral Saxony.) Many persons from Wittenberg attend.

Sometime in Spring - Luther preaches sermon criticizing pursuit of indulgences in contrast to embracing penance and the cross.

Sept - *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* held in Wittenberg; theses by Luther

Oct 31 - Luther writes letter criticizing indulgence campaign to Bishop Albrecht; letter sent that day or soon thereafter, along with 95 Theses on Indulgences and perhaps a Treatise on Indulgences; probably also wrote similarly to a few other bishops. Some days later, distributes copies of theses to some friends; might have posted theses on the Castle Church door. Theses translated into German and widely distributed by end of year. Disputation on theses never held.

Nov 17 - Albrecht's diocesan officials open Luther's packet of material, forward it to Albrecht

Dec 1 - Albrecht asks faculty of University of Mainz for opinion on texts from Luther

Dec 10 - Albrecht again requests response from Mainz faculty

Dec 13 - Sometime prior to this date, Albrecht sends texts of Luther to Rome, requesting that they be investigated.

Dec 17 - Mainz faculty sends report to Albrecht; Luther's teaching "contrary to common theological opinion."

1518

During 1518 - University of Paris faculty appeals from Pope to Council in protest to Concordat of Bologna granting French king extensive control of church in France.

Early January - Albrecht's complaint received in Rome

Jan 9 - University of Paris faculty complains to king about "false, ridiculous, scandalous, and dangerous" claims for indulgences

Jan 20 - Tetzl presents theses attacking Luther's **95** Theses at Frankfurt a.d.O.; when copies arrive in Wittenberg, seized by students from bookseller and publicly burned.

Feb 3 - Pope Leo X instructs Vicar General of Augustinian Hermits to silence Luther, who has been spreading "new dogmas," Augustinians given four months to settle matter.

Feb 13 - Luther submits his *Explanations of the 95 Theses* to his bishop, asking permission to publish

Feb 15 - Luther expresses much more unqualified rejection of indulgences in letter to mentor Georg Spalatin.

Early March - Luther informed by his Augustinian superior, Staupitz, that Vicar General has ordered discipline of Luther. Luther is to attend German meeting of order in Heidelberg in April and give account of basis for his arguments.

Mar 5 - Luther writes friend C. Scheurl that he did not intend **95** Theses to be widely distributed and that he doubts some things there said.

Mid March - Luther requests permission from Saxon Elector Frederick to absent himself from University so that he can go to Heidelberg. Frederick gives permission, but instructs Staupitz, Luther's superior, that Luther must be returned to Wittenberg immediately following meeting, effectively blocking any effort by Augustinians to hold Luther for trial. Frederick also writes local church and political authorities, asking that they give protection to Luther.

Late Mar/Early April - Luther publishes *Sermon on Indulgences and Grace* in German, meant to be more open to lay understanding than the more technical **95** Theses..

Before April 4 - Luther receives permission from his bishop to publish *Explanations*.

April 26, 1518 - Luther attends Heidelberg meeting, presents theses now known as the Heidelberg Disputation (*LW*, vol 31, pp. 35-70), explaining his 'theology of the cross.' Event draws new supporters to Luther (e.g., Martin Bucer of Strasbourg and Jacob Brenz of Württemberg).

May - Luther gives sermon on limits of power of excommunication; anonymous summary by hearer widely circulated; increases opposition to Luther in some quarters

Early May - Tetzl publishes theses criticizing Elector Frederick for protecting Luther.

May - *Processus ordinarius* opened in Rome to investigate whether Luther is teaching heresy.

June - Luther publishes *Freedom of the Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* in reply to Tetzl.

Early July - Message sent to Cardinal Cajetan, papal legate to Diet of Holy Roman Empire meeting in Augsburg, to have Luther summoned to Rome.

July - Sylvester Prierias, Master of the Papal Palace, publishes in Rome *Dialogue on the Presumptuous Conclusions on Papal Power of Martin Luther*, focussing on **95** Theses.

Aug - Luther publishes *Response* to Prierias' *Dialogue*; also *Explanations of 95 Theses* finally published.

Aug 5 - Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian writes Pope, denouncing Luther and asking that he be stopped from spreading his teachings before they gain more support.

Aug 7 - Luther receives summons to appear in Rome within **60** days to discuss his theology.

Aug 8 - Luther writes to Elector Frederick, asking that he have investigation transferred to Germany.

Before Aug 23 - Decision in Rome, probably in response to Aug 5 letter from Emperor Maximilian, to open *processus summarius* against Luther, in which is he to be treated as a known and pertinacious heretic, to be offered choice between recantation and condemnation. Cardinal

Cajetan, at Imperial Diet in Augsburg, authorized to act on this decision. Augustinian order also authorized to arrest Luther.

After Aug 23 - Elector Frederick meets with Cajetan, urges him to give Luther hearing. Cajetan does not inform Frederick about Roman summary judgment, but writes Rome, asking for new instructions that would permit him to give Luther a hearing.

Sept 11 - New instructions sent to Cajetan from Rome, authorizing him to examine Luther and make judgment.

Soon after Sept 18 - Frederick instructs Luther to come to Augsburg to meet with Cajetan.

October 12-14 - Luther interrogated by Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg; Cajetan insists that Luther retract views on foundation of indulgences and sort of faith needed effectively to receive absolution in confession. Luther unconvinced and will not retract.

About Oct 15 - Frederick informed about order to Augustinians to have Luther arrested; raises doubt about Catholic intentions.

Oct 16 - Luther prepares and has notarized an appeal from Cajetan to the Pope, stating willingness to submit to papal judgment.

About Oct 16 - Cajetan indicates through intermediaries that Luther's position on faith needed to receive absolution can be interpreted as acceptable; on indulgences, matter can be settled if Luther expresses acceptance of papal bull of **1343** *Unigenitus*, that indulgences apply treasury of merits of Christ and the saints.

Oct 17 - Luther writes to Cajetan that he is willing to observe moratorium of statements on indulgences if his opponents do so also, but he cannot make a revocation against conscience.

Oct 18 - Luther composes farewell letter to Cajetan, telling him of intention to appeal to Rome. Luther receives no answer to this or previous letter.

Oct 21-2 - Luther leaves Augsburg during night; appeal to pope posted on Cathedral door.

Oct 25 - Cajetan writes to Frederick, complaining that Luther left Augsburg despite signs of progress in discussions and urging Frederick to send Luther to Rome.

Oct 31 - Luther back in Wittenberg

Nov 9 - Papal bull on indulgences *Cum postquam* (**Dz 1447-1449**) promulgated in Rome; drafted by Cajetan

Nov 25 - Luther publishes *Proceedings at Augsburg*; while appealing to pope, also says his mind will not change.

Nov 29 - Luther has notarized an appeal from Pope to a future council in case he is excommunicated; printer leaks copies.

Late Dec - Papal diplomat Karl von Miltitz arrives in Saxony to negotiate Saxon support for crusade and the case of Luther.

1519

Jan 4-6 - Luther meets with Miltitz; offers concessions, including letter of apology to Pope for stirring up controversy (drafted, but never sent), but will not recant.

Jan 12 - *Emperor Maximilian dies.*

Mid-Jan - Luther receives copy of *Cum postquam*; lets friends know that he will not publicly repudiate it, but he cannot accept it.

C. Later events, through 1521

June 27-July 15 or 16, 1519 - Leipzig Debate between Luther and Johan Eck

Summer 1519 - Charles V of Spain elected Holy Roman Emperor, joining Spanish and Austrian possessions of the Habsburgs

July 24, 1520 - Papal Bull *Exsurge Domine* demanding that Luther recant or be excommunicated

September 21-29, 1520 - Papal bull posted in Electoral Saxony.

December 10, 1520 - Luther publicly burns papal bull.

January 3, 1521 - New papal bull, declaring Luther excommunicated.

March 29, 1521 - Luther receives summons to Imperial Diet at Worms.

April 17-18, 1521 - Luther appears before Imperial Diet, refuses to recant (“Here I stand” speech).

April 26, 1521 - Luther leaves Worms.

May 4, 1521 - Luther “kidnapped” by agents of Elector, goes into hiding at Wartburg.

May 25, 1521 - Edict of Worms banning Luther and his adherents.