The Trial of Martin Luther


In 1521, Martin Luther was put on trial for heresy in the German city of Worms. The pope, Leo X, was convinced that Martin Luther was an enemy of the church, and needed to be excommunicated. The main argument against Martin Luther was that his 95 thesis and teachings undermined the authority of the Church, which the Pope claimed was approved from God.

Throughout this packet, you will be provided with historical artifacts, biographies, and information about the trial, and the main people involved in it. You and a group of 4 peers will be assigned by the teacher to create your own video project which details the events leading up to the trial of Martin Luther, including the trial itself. Your video should be at least 5 minutes in length. You are encouraged to be creative, and can take some artistic license, but you must be careful to cover the essential events leading up to Martin Luther’s excommunication. Key events are:

* 95 Thesis
* Excommunication after burning of Papal Bull
* Diet at Worms

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>80% (mastery)</th>
<th>90% above mastery</th>
<th>100% Exceptional</th>
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<tr>
<td>DBQ</td>
<td>The questions are answered and most of them are correct.</td>
<td>The answers are all answered correctly and most are in complete sentences.</td>
<td>All answers are completely correct and are in complete sentences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>The presentation is mostly read from scripts with minimal props.</td>
<td>The presentation is well done with some props and/or humor.</td>
<td>The presentation is highly original and makes good use of props. The video is well edited.</td>
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<td>Presentation</td>
<td>The presentation has some historical accuracy, but also has several major minor inconsistencies or errors.</td>
<td>The presentation is mostly accurate, but leaves out a few details.</td>
<td>The presentation contains factual information about the events leading up to and including Luther’s trial.</td>
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Possible creative ideas include but you can make your own:

* Judge Judy or People’s Court style presentations
* Documentary
* Reality Show
The Key Participants

Pope Leo X. Pope of the Roman Catholic church from 1513-1521. Spent vast sums of the Church’s money and his own personal money restoring the Church as a cultural center of Rome. Built very large buildings and commissioned a lot of Renaissance painters. Failed to take the reforms proposed by Luther and others seriously, leading to the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther. A German monk, priest, and eventually a theologian. Fought against several key church doctrines, which eventually led to the Protestant Reformation and the establishment of a new Christian denomination, Lutherans.

Charles V. Holy Roman Emperor from 1519 -1558. The Holy Roman Emperor was the king of Germany during the Renaissance, and as the name suggests, the government was very strongly connected to the Catholic Church. Charles was strongly opposed to Luther, since he made a public declaration of faith in the Catholic Church.

Frederick the Wise. Without Frederick’s friendship and protection, Luther probably would have been arrested and executed.

Jerome Alexander. Alexander was the prosecuting attorney against Martin Luther, appointed by Leo X.

John Eck. Main German opponent against Martin Luther. Eck disagreed very strongly with Martin Luther’s positions and worked closely with Charles V to try to get rid of Protestant believers in Germany after the trial of Martin Luther.
Indulgences

An indulgence was a remission of temporal punishment after a confessor revealed sin, expressed contrition, and made the required contribution to the Church. In other words, if you wanted to be forgiven from a sin, you would tell the priest what you did, say you were worry, and then give the amount of money he told you it would take for the sin to be forgiven.

Martin Luther, in his studies of the Bible, became convinced that the Church did not have the authority to sell indulgences, because forgiveness could only come from God. When he started to teach and speak out against indulgences, Martin Luther was striking a blow against the main way the Church was raising money. Popular advertising campaigns like:

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

were especially offensive to Luther. This is what led to Luther’s 95 thesis, which he posted on the doors of the local church in Wittenberg. Luther started to argue “If the pope does have the power to release anyone from purgatory, why in the name of love does he not abolish purgatory by letting everyone out?” Meanwhile, the Pope simply called Luther a “drunk German” who would “feel differently once he is sober.”

Papal infallibility

The other issue that Martin Luther was directly against was the belief in Papal (related to the Pope) Infallibility. It meant that no matter what he did, the Pope could not do anything wrong. This continues to be a major difference between the Protestant and Catholic denominations in Christianity. Catholics believe that God has given special abilities to the Pope which allows him to speak for God on earth and to have special understanding. According to this doctrine, the pope can essentially add to Christianity and the Bible. These became the two main issues of the trial against Martin Luther.

1. What was Martin Luther’s problem with the sale of indulgences?

2. What were the Church indulgence salesmen claiming when people paid their indulgences?

3. According to the quote by Luther on indulgences, if the Pope could let people out of purgatory, what should he do?
Frederick the Wise, the Elector for Germany in the Holy Roman Empire, found himself in the middle of an unwanted controversy. From Pope Leo, Frederick had received a letter expressing concern that had provided support for Martin Luther, "a son of iniquity" who had been "hurling himself upon the Church of God." The Pope called upon Frederick to place Luther "in the hands of the Holy See lest future generations reproach you with having fostered the rise of a most pernicious heresy against the Church." Feeling obligations to the Church but also somewhat sympathetic to Luther, whose attacks on Rome won substantial support in his home region, Frederick sought a compromise. In negotiations with Cardinal Cajetan, the papal legate, Frederick prevailed in having Luther's hearing on the heresy charge moved to Augsburg, a city on German soil.

Cardinal Cajetan interviewed Luther three times from October 12-14, 1518. Told that he must recant his views on indulgences and papal infallibility, Luther refuses. On the issue of papal infallibility, Luther said, "I deny that he is above scripture." The frustrated cardinal complained after the meeting to Luther's superior, John Staupitz, "His eyes are as deep as a lake, and there are amazing speculations in his head." Luther remained in Augsburg for another week awaiting some sort of decision from the Church, but when rumors reach him of a plan to have him arrested, he fled on horseback at night.

Catejan pressured Frederick the Wise to have Luther either arrested and sent to Rome or banished from his territories, but Frederick balked. Instead, he wrote to the emperor requesting that Luther's case either be dropped or sent to Germany for a hearing before judges. On December 18, 1518, Frederick wrote a letter to Catejan informing him that he would only send Luther to Rome "after he has been convicted of heresy." He urged that Luther be given an opportunity to debate his interpretation of Scripture and submit it to a university for decision. "He should be shown in what respect he is a heretic and not condemned in advance," wrote Frederick. Frederick's views no doubt reflected those of most Germans. One writer of the period reported that he polled people in inns around the territory and found that three out of every four persons he talked to supported Luther.

4. When Catejan said that there were “amazing speculations” in Luther's head, what did he mean?

5. How did the artist of the picture of Luther and Catejan show that Luther’s defense of his beliefs was shocking to the Cardinal?

Rome’s Response to Luther

Exsurge Domine  (Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther)

Bull of Pope Leo X issued June 15, 1520

Arise, O Lord, and judge your own cause. Remember your reproaches to those who are filled with foolishness all through the day. Listen to our prayers, for foxes have arisen seeking to destroy the vineyard whose winepress you alone have trod. When you were about to ascend to your Father, you committed the care, rule, and administration of the vineyard, an image of the triumphant church, to Peter, as the head and your vicar and his successors. The wild boar from the forest seeks to destroy it and every wild beast feeds upon it.

We beseech you also, Paul, to arise. It was you that enlightened and illuminated the Church by your doctrine and by a martyrdom like Peter’s. For now a new Porphyry rises who, as the old once wrongfully assailed the holy apostles, now assails the holy pontiffs, our predecessors.

Rebuking them, in violation of your teaching, instead of imploring them, he is not ashamed to assail them, to tear at them, and when he desairs of his cause, to stoop to insults. He is like the heretics "whose last defense," as Jerome says, "is to start spewing out a serpent’s venom with their tongue when they see that their causes are about to be condemned, and spring to insults when they see they are vanquished."

Therefore we can, without any further citation or delay, proceed against him to his condemnation and damnation as one whose faith is notoriously suspect and in fact a true heretic with the full severity of each and all of the above penalties and censures. Yet, with the advice of our brothers, imitating the mercy of almighty God who does not wish the death of a sinner but rather that he be converted and live, and forgetting all the injuries inflicted on us and the Apostolic See, we have decided to use all the compassion we are capable of. It is our hope, so far as in us lies, that he will experience a change of heart by taking the road of mildness we have proposed, return, and turn away from his errors. We will receive him kindly as the prodigal son returning to the embrace of the Church.

Therefore let Martin himself and all those adhering to him, and those who shelter and support him, through the merciful heart of our God and the sprinkling of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ by which and through whom the redemption of the human race and the upbuilding of holy mother Church was accomplished, know that from our heart we exhort and beseech that he cease to disturb the peace, unity, and truth of the Church for which the Savior prayed so earnestly to the Father. Let him abstain from his pernicious errors that he may come back to us. If they really will obey, and certify to us by legal documents that they have obeyed, they will find in us the affection of a father’s love, the opening of the font of the effects of paternal charity, and opening of the font of mercy and clemency.

We enjoin, however, on Martin that in the meantime he cease from all preaching or the office of preacher.

6. What 3 people does the Pope call on to judge Martin Luther’s actions?

7. Under what condition does the Pope say that the Catholic Church would welcome Luther back?

8. What did Martin Luther do when he read this statement written by Leo X?
**Against the Execrable Bull of the Antichrist**  
(excerpt)

Martin Luther’s Reply to the Papal Bull of Leo X  

I have heard that a bull against me has gone through the whole earth before it came to me, because being a daughter of darkness it feared the light of my face. For this reason and also because it condemns manifestly the Christian articles I had my doubts whether it really came from Rome and was not rather the progeny of that man of lies, dissimulation, errors, and heresy, that monster John Eck. The suspicion was further increased when it was said that Eck was the apostle of the bull. Indeed the style and the spittle all point to Eck. True, it is not impossible that where Eck is the apostle there one should find the kingdom of Antichrist. Nevertheless in the meantime I will act as if I thought Leo not responsible, not that I may honor the Roman name, but because I do not consider myself worthy to suffer such high things for the truth of God. For who before God would be happier than Luther if he were condemned from so great and high a source for such manifest truth? But the cause seeks a worthier martyr. I with my sins merit other things. But whoever wrote this bull, he is Antichrist. I protest before God, our Lord Jesus, his sacred angels, and the whole world that with my whole heart I dissent from the damnation of this bull, that I curse and execrate it as sacrilege and blasphemy of Christ, God’s Son and our Lord. This be my recantation, Oh bull, thou daughter of bulls.

Having given my testimony I proceed to take up the bull. Peter said that you should give a reason for the faith that is in you, but this bull condemns me from its own word without any proof from Scripture, whereas I back up all my assertions from the Bible. I ask thee, ignorant Antichrist, dost thou think that with thy naked words thou canst prevail against the armor of Scripture? Hast thou learned this from Cologne and Louvain? If this is all it takes, just to say, “I dissent, I deny,” what fool, what ass, what mole, what log could not condemn? Does not thy meretricious brow blush that with thine inane smoke thou withstandest the lightning of the divine Word? Why do we not believe the Turks? Why do we not admit the Jews? Why do we not honor the heretic if damning is all that it takes? But Luther, who is used to *bellum*, is not afraid of *bullam*. I can distinguish between inane paper and the omnipotent Word of God.

They show their ignorance and bad conscience by inventing the adverb “respectively.” My articles are called “respectively some heretical, some erroneous, some scandalous,” which is as much as to say, “We don’t know which are which.” Oh meticulous ignorance! I wish to be instructed, not respectively, but absolutely and certainly. I demand that they show absolutely, not respectively, distinctly and not confusedly, certainly and not probably, clearly and not obscurely, point by point and not in a lump, just what is heretical. Let them show where I am a heretic, or dry up their spittle. They say that some articles are heretical, some erroneous, some scandalous, some offensive. The implication is that those which are heretical are not erroneous, those which are erroneous are not scandalous, and those which are scandalous are not offensive. What then is this, to say that something is not heretical, not scandalous, not false, but yet is offensive? So then, you impious and insensate papists, write soberly if you want to write. Whether this bull is by Eck or by the pope, it is the sum of all impiety, blasphemy, ignorance, impudence, hypocrisy, lying – in a word, it is Satan and his Antichrist.

If anyone despises my fraternal warning, I am free from his blood in the last judgment. It is better that I should die a thousand times than that I should retract one syllable of the condemned articles. And as they excommunicated me for the sacrilege of heresy, so I excommunicate them in the name of the sacred truth of God. Christ will judge whose excommunication will stand. Amen.

9. What does Luther accuse the Pope and Eck of being in his response to the Papal Bull?

10. In his final paragraph, what does Luther claim will happen to those who ignore his warning?
Diet at Worms

Luther was eventually taken to court before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Charles V was being pressured by some powerful German princes to protect Luther, but the Pope’s representative, Jerome Alexander threatened the Emperor: “If ye Germans who pay least into the Pope’s treasury shake off his yoke, we shall take care that ye mutually kill yourselves, and wade in your own blood.”

Frederick the Wise had been successful in protecting Luther from arrest, which would have probably led to his being taken to the Pope in Rome and burned at the stake as a heretic. Instead, his trial took place in Germany where he was very popular. At the Diet at Worms, Luther presented his case, concluding “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

After the trial, Luther was “kidnapped” by Frederick and taken to one of Frederick’s castles. Since the German Princes were almost as powerful as the Emperor himself, Luther was safe with Frederick. Inspired by Luther’s defiance of Catholic authority, the peasants in Germany began a massive revolt, which led to the death of hundreds of thousands of Germans, most of them peasants.

The fallout of the Diet would be massive, as German Princes began to align themselves with the Pope or to use the opportunity to defy the Vatican’s authority and establish more power within Germany itself. Within 80 years as the princes took sides, Germany would deteriorate into a war between Catholics and Protestants, known as the Thirty Years War. It is estimated that as many as 8 million people died during this war, which was begun directly as a result of the division of German princes between Protestant and Catholic.

11. How did Alexander’s threat to Charles V eventually come true?

12. What reason did Luther give for why he would follow the words of Scripture rather than popes and councils?
Images

Martin Luther’s books being burned in Rome

Luther preparing to defend himself at trial

Luther posts his 95 Thesis

The trial of Martin Luther

The sale of indulgences