

0. PROTESTANT REFORMATION and FRANCE - Story
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France was mostly a Catholic country before Luther began the Protestant Reformation. When the Reformation reached France, Protestant believers in that country became known as Huguenots. As Huguenots grew in number, they began to destroy Catholic relics (and other things) which were sacred to Catholics. This 16th-century illustration—attributed to [Antoine Caron](#) (1521-1599)—depicts Protestants looting Catholic churches in Lyon, France during 1562. Online via Wikimedia Commons.

The trouble in France started after [Martin Luther](#), at the time a German monk, nailed his 95 arguments with Rome on [the door](#) (destroyed by fire in 1760) of [the Castle Church](#) in [Wittenberg](#), Germany. It was October 31, 1517.

[Luther](#), among other things, thought it was wrong for the Catholic Church to [sell](#) pieces of paper called "[Indulgences](#)," which were ostensibly designed to shorten a soul's stay in [purgatory](#). (Indulgences can [still be obtained](#) from the Catholic Church, but they must be earned, not purchased.)

Since the Church used money obtained from the [sale](#) of "[Indulgences](#)" to [fund projects](#) (like [St. Peter's Basilica](#)), [Luther](#) (who later married [Katharina von Bora](#) with whom he had six children) believed the Church was [deceiving people](#). He argued that mankind was saved by *sola Scriptura* (Scripture - the Bible - alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone), not by the teachings of the Catholic Church.

With his [95 Theses](#), citing Church abuses, Luther (follow the link to see [his home in Wittenberg](#)) started a protest against the authority of the Catholic Church. His reforms led to the [Protestant Reformation](#); his ideas quickly spread throughout Europe.

John Calvin, in Switzerland, agreed with Luther. His ideas, set forth in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, spread to France. By 1550, preachers brought Bibles from Switzerland into France where people converted to the Protestant faith in astonishing numbers. They were called [Huguenots](#).

French Catholics believed that Protestant ideas would cause the wrath of God to descend on everyone. To avoid such a catastrophe, would they have to wipe out the Protestant faith - and its adherents - from French soil?

Protestants, on the other hand, thought Catholics were misguided. With unrestrained arrogance, Huguenots destroyed relics Catholics held sacred even as they ruined crosses and statues of saints.

One powerful French noble family (Bourbon) was Protestant while another (Guise) was Catholic. ([Mary Queen of Scots](#), a member of the Guise family, was married to the young French King Francis II, son of Catherine de Medici.)

Each side believed its view was "truth." And Luther, near the end of his life, became deeply antisemitic. The stage was set for war and massacres.

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Media Stream



Martin Luther - Nailing the 95 Arguments to the Church Door

Image online, courtesy Historymartinez's Blog page.

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Castle Church Doors at Wittenberg

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The Castle Church Nave

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Wittenberg, Germany

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Martin Luther

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Funding Church Projects

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Martin Luther

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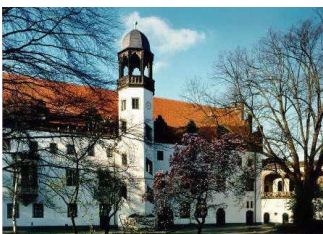
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Katharina von Bora

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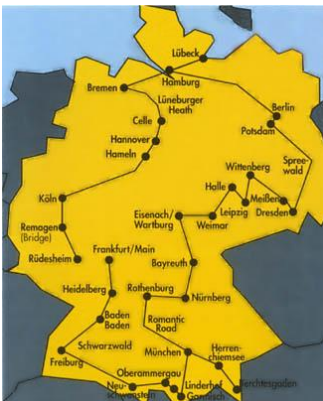


Martin Luther - His Home in Wittenberg, Germany

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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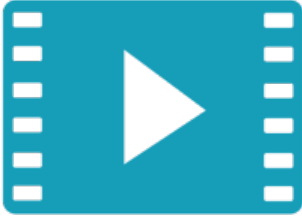
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Wittenberg, Germany - Map Locator

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Protestant Reformation - History and Impact

"Reluctant Revolutionary," a PBS documentary about Martin Luther embedded above, is online via PBS' Channel at YouTube. Copyright, PBS, all rights reserved. Video provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the documentary. The documentary is narrated by Liam Neeson.

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