

Martin Luther (der 10. November 1483—der 2. Februar 1546)

Luther and Protestant Reformation

Martin Luther's daring revolution: The reformation 500 years on Important writings

The rebellious monk, who still thinks he can reform his Catholic Church, composes three major reformation texts in 1520. The most important one, "On the Freedom of a Christian," is more or less a basic law for Christians that sometimes reads like incitement to revolution.

Luther sums up the meaning of Christian life in two theses: "A Christian is a free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a dutiful servant of all, subject to all." These words convince a large part of the population that desires freedom: freedom from fear of death, from indulgences and other financial duties, freedom from repression by higher-ups.

But Luther, who uses the term "freedom" in a purely theological sense, has an entirely different understanding of freedom. It comes from the Apostle Paul in the Bible. Man's fundamental behavior is not free but rather is influenced by the Devil and sin, or by Christ and goodness. Luther wants to emancipate people by turning them towards Christ. He rejects political radicalization and armed rebellion.

The "Empire" strikes back

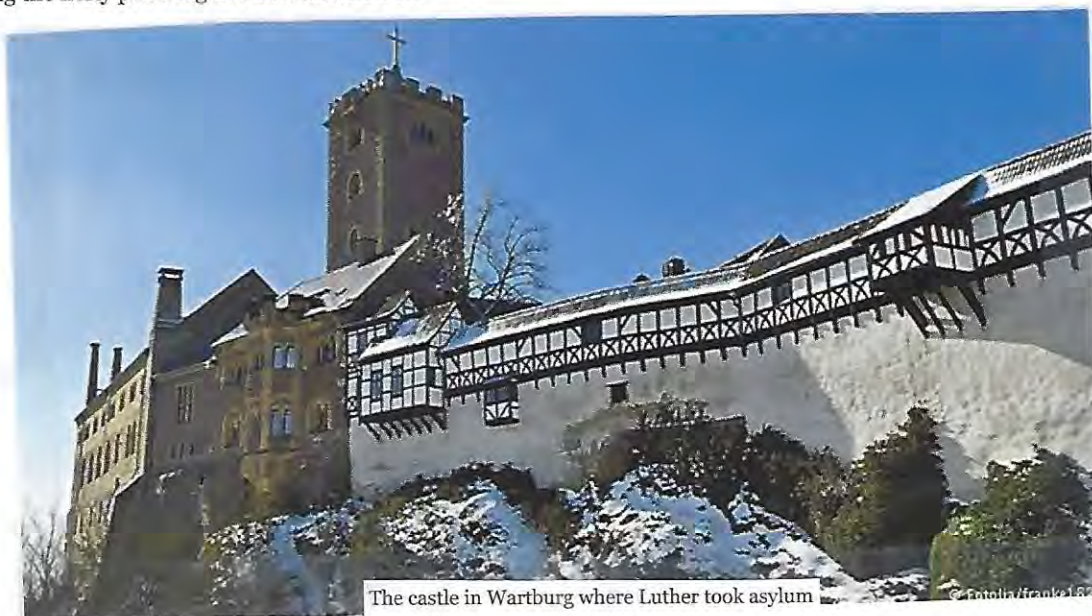
Provocative theses, reformation writings, stubborn refusal to revoke ideas — it's all too much for the Pope Leo X who in January 1521 excommunicates Luther.

In April that same year, Luther has to defend himself before the emperor. In his famous April 18th speech, the reformer states that he will only take back his words if biblical fact can disprove them, and he underlines that he cannot act against his conscience. "Here I stand. God help me. Amen," he supposedly concluded his speech. Emperor Charles V places the [Edict of Worms upon Luther](#), declaring him an outlaw and banning his writing.

Productive time in Wartburg

Luther doesn't have to wait long for help. His countryman Frederick III, Prince of Saxony, arranges for the outlaw to be kidnapped during his return home from Worms and brought to safety in Wartburg Castle, where he writes under a pseudonym.

Luther uses these 10 months to compile numerous writings that further define Reformation issues. He also becomes the first person to translate the New Testament from ancient Greek into German. Up until that point, more than 70 versions had existed, all of which were based on the Latin text, itself a translation filled with inaccuracy. Luther's translation, printed in 1522, is a linguistic masterpiece — and a bestseller carrying the hefty price tag of half a fattened ox.



The castle in Wartburg where Luther took asylum