

## **Martin Luther**

### **Biography / Overview**

Martin Luther (1483–1546 CE) was a German monk, theologian, professor, and reformer whose 95 Theses (1517) ignited the Protestant Reformation, fracturing Western Christendom. Born in Eisleben (Saxony), he studied law at Erfurt before a 1505 thunderstorm vow led him to join the Augustinian friars. Ordained in 1507, he earned a doctorate in theology (1512) and taught at Wittenberg University. Tormented by guilt and *Anfechtungen* (spiritual trials), Luther developed a theology of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), rejecting indulgences and papal authority. Excommunicated in 1521, he translated the Bible into German, married Katharina von Bora (1525), and shaped Lutheran confessional identity. His hymns, catechisms, and polemics transformed worship, education, and politics.

Modern scholars view Luther as a pivotal figure in modernity: catalyst of individualism, vernacular literacy, and secular authority, while critiquing his anti-Jewish writings and role in peasant revolts. His legacy dominates Protestantism, influences Catholicism (via *ressourcement*), and persists in global Christianity.

Sources:

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Martin Luther – <https://iep.utm.edu/luther/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Martin Luther – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/luther/>

World History Encyclopedia: Martin Luther – [https://www.worldhistory.org/Martin\\_Luther/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Martin_Luther/)

### **Bibliography / Primary Sources**

#### **Major Published Works:**

*95 Theses* (Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum)

October 31, 1517. Latin disputation on indulgences.

*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520)

Call for secular reform of the Church.

*On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520)

Reduces sacraments to three (later two).

*The Freedom of a Christian* (1520)

Paradox of faith and works.

*Small Catechism* (1529) & *Large Catechism* (1529)

Instructional manuals for laity and clergy.

*German Bible* (1522 NT, 1534 full)

First major vernacular translation from original languages.

Key Editions:

*Weimarer Ausgabe* (WA): Critical edition (1883–2009, 120+ vols.) – <https://www.luther Werke.de>  
*Luther's Works* (American Edition, 1955–1986, 55 vols.; expanded 2009–) – <https://fortresspress.com/luthersworks>

Digital: Luther Digital (Weimar); Project Wittenberg – <https://lutheranreformation.org>

### **Birth Date / Death Date**

Born: November 10, 1483, Eisleben, Holy Roman Empire

Died: February 18, 1546, Eisleben

Source: Brecht, *Martin Luther* (3 vols., Fortress, 1985–1993)

### **Notable / Best-Known For**

Author of the *95 Theses*: Sparked the Reformation; challenged indulgences and papal power.

*Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia*: Core Protestant principles.

German Bible Translation: Standardized High German; “Luther Bible” still in use.

Hymnody: “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” (A Mighty Fortress).

Sources:

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Luther – <https://iep.utm.edu/luther/>

Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (Yale, 1989)

### **Famous Quotes**

“Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

– Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521 (traditional, likely apocryphal)

“Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.”

– *Freedom of a Christian*

“The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.”

– Preface to the Old Testament

### **Major Works / Textual Contents**

*95 Theses*: 95 propositions on penance, indulgences, papal authority.

*Three Treatises* (1520):

- *To the Christian Nobility*: Priesthood of all believers; secular reform.
- *Babylonian Captivity*: Sacraments reduced; attacks transubstantiation.
- *Freedom of a Christian*: Faith vs. works paradox.

*Catechisms (1529):*

- *Small*: Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Lord's Supper.
- *Large*: Expanded theological exposition.

Source:

*Luther's Works* Table of Contents – Fortress Press

### **Influences / Intellectual Context**

Augustinian Theology: Via Staupitz; grace, predestination, anti-Pelagian.

Scriptural Humanism: Erasmus, Reuchlin; *ad fontes* method.

Medieval Mysticism: Tauler, *Theologia Deutsch*.

Scholasticism: Critiqued Ockham, Biel; rejected Aristotle in theology.

Sources:

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Luther – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/luther/>

Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (Yale, 2015)

### **Legacy and Modern Significance**

Historical Impact: Fragmented Christendom; inspired Calvin, Zwingli, Anabaptists.

Political: Cuius regio, eius religio (Peace of Augsburg, 1555).

Cultural: Vernacular literacy, congregational singing, work ethic.

Modern Reappraisal: Ecumenical dialogue (Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration, 1999); critiques of antisemitism.

Sources:

Marty, *Martin Luther* (Penguin, 2004)

### **Modern Moments / Impact on 21st Century**

1955–1986: *Luther's Works* American Edition (55 vols.); expanded 2009–.

1999: Joint Declaration on Justification (Vatican & Lutheran World Federation).

2017: 500th Reformation anniversary; global events, Pope Francis in Lund.

Ongoing: Weimar Edition digitized ([luther.werke.de](http://luther.werke.de)); Project Wittenberg (texts).

Ongoing: Core in theology, history, German studies (Heidelberg, Yale, Uppsala).

Ongoing: Stanford/IEP maintain peer-reviewed entries.

2020s: Luther in digital theology, AI sermon analysis, Reformation tourism (Wittenberg UNESCO).

### **Suggested Reading and Resources**

#### **A. Secondary Literature (Scholarship)**

Oberman, Heiko A. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*. Yale University Press, 1989.

Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther* (3 vols.). Fortress Press, 1985–1993.  
Hendrix, Scott H. *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*. Yale University Press, 2015.  
Kolb, Robert. *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Marty, Martin E. *Martin Luther: A Life*. Penguin, 2004.

#### **B. Archival or Online Sources**

Luther Digital (Weimarer Ausgabe) – <https://luther.werke.de>

Project Wittenberg: English texts – <https://lutheranreformation.org>

Lutheran World Federation: Ecumenical documents – <https://lutheranworld.org>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Luther – <https://iep.utm.edu/luther/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Luther – <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/luther/>