

## **AP World History**

### **Unit 3: Land-Based Empires**

#### **Topic 3.3: Belief Systems**

#### **Primary Source Excerpt-Martin Luther, *The 95 Theses* (1517)**

#### **Background about the Author**

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a theologian and preacher who spearheaded the Protestant Reformation movement. Many practices and beliefs of the Catholic Church seemed to him immoral and degenerative. He was convinced that all Christians, not just the clergy, had the right to read and understand the Bible. Indeed, he concluded that only accepting divine grace could lead a person to eternal salvation, and accepting that grace was possible only to a person with faith. But faith could come only to a person who had read and understood the Bible. He therefore wanted to make the Bible available to everyone, a goal he contributed to by translating the New and Old Testaments into German. Naturally, his views made it impossible to accept the Catholic idea that salvation could be assured simply by giving material gifts to the church—for example, by buying indulgences. Such fundamental attacks on institutionalized practices made Luther an enemy of the established church, led to much strife, and ultimately shattered the unity of Western Christendom. The following is an excerpt from the Ninety-Five Theses, which he famously nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in 1517.

#### **Primary Source**

5. The pope has neither the will nor the power to remit any penalties, except those which he has imposed by his own authority, or by that of the canons.

6. The pope has no power to remit any guilt, except by declaring and warranting it to have been remitted by God; or at most by remitting cases reserved for himself; in which cases, if his power were despised, guilt would certainly remain.

21. ...those preachers of indulgences are in error who say that, by the indulgences of the pope, a man is loosed and saved from all punishment.

28. It is certain that when the money rattles in the chest, avarice and gain may be increased, but the effect of the intercession of the Church depends on the will of God alone.

32. Those who believe that, through letters of indulgences, they are made sure of their own salvation, will eternally be damned along with their teachers.

43. Christians should be taught that he who gives to a poor man, or lends to a needy man, does better than if he bought pardons.

45. Christians should be taught that he who sees any one in need, and, passing by him, gives money for pardons, is not purchasing for himself the indulgences of the pope, but the anger of God.

46. Christians should be taught that, unless they have superfluous wealth, they are bound to keep what is necessary for the use of their own households, and by no means to lavish it on pardons.

47. Christians should be taught that, while they are free to buy pardons, they are not commanded to do so.

48. Christians should be taught that the pope, in granting pardons, has both more need and more desire that devout prayer should be made for him, than that money should be readily paid.