

The Leipzig Debate

Who Won? John Eck or Martin Luther

Curriculum Area: World History/European History

Level: AP/Honors

Author: Hank Bitten

Lesson Objectives:

New Jersey Core Content Standards:

6.2.12.B.2.b: Relate the division of European regions during this time period into those that remained Catholic and those that became Protestant to the practice of religion in the New World.

6.2.12.D.2.b: Determine the factors that led to the Reformation and the impact on European politics.

NY Global Studies Learning Standards:

G2: 2. Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses: the challenge to the power and authority of the Roman Catholic Church

Common Core Standards: (Grades 9-10)

Reading in History 9-10:1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of information.

Reading in History 9-10:2 Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Reading in History 9-10:8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

Common Core Standards: (Grades 11-12)

Reading in History 11-12:1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

Reading in History 11-12:2 Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationship among key details and ideas.

Writing in History 11-12:8 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Background to The Leipzig Debate July 1519

The year 1519 might be considered a “turning point” year in European history, with the death of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor for the past 59 years, the Spanish victory over the Aztecs at the Battle of Tenochitlan, and the decision of Pope Leo X regarding the possible excommunication of German priest and University of Wittenberg professor, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther.

The Roman Catholic Church was in need of reforms in the 16th century. Erasmus, Thomas More, Thomas Wosley, Jan Hus, Jon Wycliffe, and Martin Luther were the most popular critics who called for changes. Each of them desired to reform the church from within and respected the authority of the pope and church councils. The issue in the Ninety-five Theses addressed some of the strategies for selling letters of indulgences in the German towns.

Letters of Indulgences were not necessarily expensive but the economic impact over several years is that an estimated 144,000 ducati left the Holy Roman Empire each year to build St. Peter’s basilica in Rome! The annual expenses of Pope Leo X were more than 600,000 ducati – leaving a significant deficit. The income of a middle class worker in Germany was about 200 ducati a year.

The theological impact was the way in which Martin Luther interpreted the passage of Romans 3:28 - ***For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*** Luther’s idea of “justification of faith” is based on God’s love for a person and that good works or payments to the Treasury of God are not necessary for eternal life. Additional statements of Martin Luther that might be considered heresy or false teaching were on the Roman Catholic teachings of the infallibility of the pope and the immortality of the soul.

Luther posted the Ninety-five Theses on October 31, 1517 along with his “Explanations” or proof for each of the 95 statements. In April 1518, he successfully defended all of them before a committee of Augustinian monks (Luther’s monastic order), with some disagreement by the older and conservative monks. The Ninety-five Theses were published and circulated throughout Europe. Luther gained national recognition and popularity because of his statements.

Pope Leo X summoned Luther to Rome to recant and ask forgiveness for his teachings or face excommunication from the Catholic Church. Through a series of letters to German princes and Georg Spalatan, an advisor to the new emperor, Charles V (formerly Charles I of Spain), the hearing was moved to Leipzig in Germany. The Leipzig Debate would also be conducted in Luther’s native language of German.

Classroom Activities:

Motivating Activity: **Discuss:** The penalty for not completing homework assignments is the punishment of receiving a grade of zero, which can also result in failing a course or having to makeup work in summer school. Should a student be permitted to receive extra credit or partial credit by completing an alternate assignment or resubmitting the incomplete assignment for minimal credit – just to pass the course? (Why or Why Not?) To what extent should course credit be awarded to a student for effort or work as compared to a minimal score of 60% on a final exam or a course grade?

Historical Background: Read “*Background to the Leipzig Debate*” and **Document #1 “The Debate at Leipzig, July 4, 1519.”**

Be sure the students understand the reason for Letters of Indulgence as a certificate of penance, the economic importance of the sale of Letters of Indulgences to the Roman Catholic Church, and the importance of this debate on indulgences and Luther’s teaching of the Justification of Faith.

Core Content and Classroom Activities:

- A. Role-play the debate by reading **Documents 1, 5, 6, and 7.**
- B. In cooperative groups, discuss the purpose, problems, and solutions to the Letters of Indulgences. (**Documents 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.**)
- C. In a plenary discussion, use the Socratic Method to analyze the possible implications of Luther’s attacks on the pope. (**Documents 7, 8, 9, and 11**)
- D. Answer the question: Did Martin Luther go too far in his writings and testimony at the Leipzig Debate? Should he be excommunicated for his statements and beliefs?

Critical Thinking: Have students analyze the conflicting perspectives in the debate on indulgences and the role of the pope with particular attention on the impact of ending indulgences or not having a pope. Read **Documents 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, and 11.**

Checking for Understanding: Check that each student understands the following:

- A. The political, economic, and social/spiritual importance of the Leipzig Debate.
- B. The reasons for the popularity of Martin Luther and the areas of Europe where he had approval or rejection.
- C. The reasons why John Eck is considered as the “winner” of the debate.
- D. Luther’s approach to scholasticism in holding that the text of Holy Scripture had to be the basis for truth over reason.

Assessment: There are several ways to assess student understanding and mastery of the Core Content and Common Core Standards.

- A. An essay explaining the strongest arguments in the Leipzig Debate.
- B. A rubric to evaluate the depth of student discussion regarding quality of answers, inquiring questions, and level of participation. The rubric should evaluate the skills in the Common Core Standards regarding the quality of information in primary and secondary sources, the sequence/development of information/argumentation in the debate and documents, and the ability to summarize and prioritize the information.
- C. A homework assignment involving students in writing a news report on the Leipzig Debate for audiences in Germany, Italy, France, England, and/or other areas.

Document 1: Description of Martin Luther, Andreas von Carlstadt John Eck – Eyewitness Account July 1519 Roland Bainton. *Here I Stand*. p. 87. (Note: Carlstadt is a colleague of Luther at the University of Wittenberg)

“Martin is of middle height, emaciated from care and study, so that you can almost count his bones through his skin. He is in the vigor of manhood and has a clear, penetrating voice. He is learned and has the Scripture as his fingers’ ends. He knows Greek and Hebrew sufficiently to judge of the interpretations. A perfect forest of words and ideas stands at his command. He is affable and friendly, in no sense dour or arrogant. He is equal to anything. In company, he is vivacious, jocose, always cheerful and gay no matter how hard his adversaries press him. Everyone chides him for the fault of being a little too insolent in his reproaches and more caustic than is prudent for an innovator in religion or becoming to a theologian. Much the same can be said of Carlstadt, though in a lesser degree. He is smaller than Luther, with a complexion of smoked herring. His voice is thick and unpleasant. He is slower in memory and quicker in anger. Eck is a heavy, square set fellow with a full German voice supported by a hefty chest. He would make a tragedian or town crier, but his voice is rather rough than clear, his eyes and mouth and his whole face remind one more of a butcher than a theologian.”

Document 2: Do Good Works Demonstrate Faith? Holy Bible. James 2:26

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Document 3: Justification by Faith Holy Bible. Romans 3:23-24

“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Document 4: Repentance Roland Bainton. *Here I Stand*. p.67.

“Luther had made the discovery that the biblical text from the Latin Vulgate, used to support the sacrament of penance, was a mistranslation. The Latin for Matthew 4:17 read *penitentiam agite*, ‘do penance,’ but from the Greek New Testament of Erasmus, Luther had learned that the original meant simply ‘be penitent.’ The literal sense was “change your mind.”

Matthew 4:17 – “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Document 5: Indulgences Excerpts from Luther’s Statements in the Leipzig Debate

“We are familiar with the assertion of would-be theologians that the souls in purgatory are certain of their salvation and that grace is no longer increased in them; but we marvel at these very learned men that they can offer the uneducated no cogent reason for this their conviction.” 9

“To say that indulgences are a blessing for a Christian is insane, for they are in truth a hindrance to a good work; and a Christian must reject indulgences because of their abuse, for the Lord says, ‘I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake.’ [Isaiah 43:25], not for the sale of money.” 11

Document 6: The Ninety-five Theses: #21-24 October 31, 1517

21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.

22. As a matter of fact, the pope remits to souls in purgatory no penalty, which, according to canon law, they should have paid in their life.

23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.

24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

Document 7: Transcript of the Leipzig Debate: (www.graceopcmoesto.org/download/notes/852/notes.pdf)

July 4, 1519 – Debate on the Pope

Luther: “The head of the Church militant is Christ himself, and not a man. I believe this on the testimony of God’s Word. He must reign, says Scripture, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. Let us not listen to those who banish Christ to the Church triumphant in heaven. His kingdom is a kingdom of faith. We cannot see our Head, and yet we have one.”

Eck: “It is from Rome, according to Saint Cyprian, that sacerdotal unity has proceeded.”

Luther: “For the Western Church, I grant it. But is not this same Roman Church the offspring of that of Jerusalem? It is the latter, properly speaking, that is the nursing-mother of all the churches.”

Eck: “Saint Jerome declares that if an extraordinary power, superior to all others, were not given to the pope, there would be in the churches as many sects as there were pontiffs.”

Luther: “Given, that is to say, if all the rest of believers consent to it, this power might be conceded to the chief pontiff by human right. And I will not deny, that if all the believers in the world agree in recognizing as first and supreme pontiff either the Bishop of Rome, or of Paris, or of Magdeburg, we should acknowledge him as such from the respect due to this general agreement of the Church; but that has never been seen yet, and never will be seen. Even in our own days, does not the Greek Church refuse its assent to Rome?”

Eck: “Well then, I will come to the point. The worthy doctor calls upon me to prove that the primacy of the Church of Rome is of Divine right. I will prove it by this expression of Christ: Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my Church. Saint Augustine, in one of his epistles, has thus explained the meaning of this passage ‘Thou art Peter, and on this rock (that is to say, on Peter) I will build my Church.’ It is true that in another place the same father has explained that by this rock we should understand Christ himself, but he has not retracted his former exposition.”

Luther: “If the reverend doctor desires to attack me, let him first reconcile these contradictions in Saint Augustine. For it is most certain that Augustine has said many times that the rock was Christ, and perhaps not more than once that it was Peter himself. But even should Saint Augustine and all the Fathers say that the Apostle is the rock of which Christ speaks, I would resist them, single-handed, in reliance upon the Holy Scriptures, that is, on Divine right; for it is written: Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Peter himself terms Christ the chief corner-stone, and a living stone on which we are built up a spiritual house.”

Eck: “I am surprised at the humility and modesty with which the reverend doctor undertakes to oppose, alone, so many illustrious Fathers, and pretends to know more than the sovereign pontiffs, the councils, the doctors, and the universities! . . . It would be surprising, no doubt, if God had hidden the truth from so many saints and martyrs — until the advent of the reverend father!”

Luther: “The Fathers are not against me. Saint Augustine and Saint Ambrose, both most excellent doctors, teach as I teach. *Super isto articulo fidei, fundata est Ecclesia*, says Saint Ambrose, when explaining what is meant by the rock on which the Church is built. Let my opponent then set a curb upon his tongue. To express himself as he does, will only serve to excite contention, and not be to discuss like a true doctor.”

Eck: “The reverend doctor has come well armed into the lists. I beg your lordships to excuse me, if I do not exhibit such accuracy of research. I came here to discuss, and not to make a book.”

Luther: “I do not like and I never shall like a schism. Since on their own authority the Bohemians have separated from our unity, they have done wrong, even if the Divine right had pronounced in favor of their doctrines; for the supreme Divine right is charity and oneness of mind.”

Document 8: On the Authority of Church Councils or Scripture

www.gracepcmodesto.org/download/notes/852/notes.pdf

Luther: “Among the articles of faith held by John Huss and the Bohemians, there are some that are most Christian. This is a positive certainty. Here, for instance, is one: ‘That there is but one universal Church;’ and here is another: ‘It is not necessary for salvation to believe the Roman Church superior to all others.’ It is of little consequence to me whether these things were said by Wickliffe or by Huss . . . they are truth.”

“What! are not Gregory of Nazianzum, Basil the Great, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, and an immense number besides of Greek bishops — are they not saved? And yet they did not believe that the Church of Rome was above the other Churches! . . . It is not in the power of the Roman pontiffs to make new articles of faith. The Christian believer acknowledges no other authority than Holy Scripture. This alone is the right Divine. I beg the worthy doctor to concede that the Roman pontiffs were men, and that he will not make them gods.”

Eck: “The reverend father is a very poor cook,” said he; “he has made a terrible hodge-podge of Greek saints and heretics; so that the odor of sanctity in the one prevents us from smelling the poison of the others.”

Luther: “The worthy doctor is becoming abusive. In my opinion, there can be no communion between Christ and Belial.”

Eck: “Reverend father, if you believe that a council, regularly assembled, can err, you are in my eyes nothing better than a heathen and a publican!”

Document 9: Debate on the Pope

Roland Bainton. *Here I Stand*. pp. 88-90.

Eck: “What does it all matter whether the pope is by divine right or by human right?”

Luther: “Perfectly right. Even if there were ten popes or a thousand popes, there would be no schism. The unity of Christendom could be preserved under numerous heads just as the separated nations under different sovereigns dwell in concord.”

Eck: “I marvel that the Reverend Father should forget the everlasting dissension of the English and the French, the inveterate hatred of the French for the Spaniards, and all the Christian blood spilled over the Kingdom of Naples. As for me, I confess one faith, one Lord Jesus Christ, and I venerate the Roman pontiff as Christ’s vicar. The Holy Roman and Apostolic Church obtained the primacy not from the apostles but from our Lord and Saviour himself, and it enjoys pre-eminence of power above all of the churches and the whole flock of Christian people. The sacerdotal order commenced in the period of the New Testament directly after our Lord Christ, when to Peter was committed the pontificate previously exercised in the Church by Christ himself.”

Luther: “I expunge these decretals. No one will ever persuade me that the holy pope and martyr said that.”

Eck: “I see that you are following the pestiferous errors of John Wyclif, who said, “It is not necessary for salvation to believe that the Roman Church is above all others. And you are espousing the pestilent errors of John Hus, who claimed that Peter neither was nor is the head of the Holy Catholic Church.”

Luther: “I repulse the charge of Bohemianism. I have never approved of their schism. Even though they had divine right on their side, they ought nor to have withdrawn from the Church, because the highest divine right is unity and charity.”

Pause - “As for the article of Hus that it is not necessary for salvation to believe the Roman Church superior to all others, I do not care whether this comes from Wyclif or from Hus. I know that innumerable Greeks have been saved through they never heard this article, it is not in the power of the Roman pontiff or of the Inquisition to construct new articles of faith. No believing Christian can be coerced beyond holy writ. By divine law we are forbidden to believe anything which is not established by divine Scripture or manifest revelation. One of the canon lawyers has said that the opinion of a single private man has more weight than that of a Roman pontiff or an ecclesiastical council of grounded on a better authority of reason. I cannot believe that the Council of Constance would condemn these propositions of Hus. “

Eck: “Whichever they were, none of them was called most Christian and evangelical; and if you defend them then you are heretical, erroneous, blasphemous, presumptuous, seditious, and offensive to pious ears, respectively.”

Luther: “Let me talk German. I am being misunderstood by the people. I assert that a council has sometimes erred and may sometimes err. Nor has a council authority to establish new articles of faith. A council cannot make divine right out of that which by nature is not divine right. Councils have contradicted each other, for the recent Lateran council stated that a council is above a pope. A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. For the sake of Scripture we should reject popes and councils.”

Document 10: Outcomes of the Reformation. Diarmaid MacCulloch. *The Reformation: A History*. p. 652.

“Many people in Europe decided against joining official Churches. In most Catholic lands, official pressure and harassment meant that Protestants had small chance of hanging on to open profession of their deviant beliefs, but in Protestant Europe, south of Scandinavia, with its development of a remarkably uniform Lutheranism, there was a significant spread of alternative religious bodies.”

Document 11: Luther's Explanation of Proposition Thirteen Concerning the Power of the Pope. Scott H. Hendrix. *Luther and the Papacy*. p.82-83.

“Luther was quite willing to admit that the pope was the head of the Western church by human right and that he enjoyed authority given to him by God just as all earthly rulers did....Crucial to his argument was the treatment of two biblical texts that served as the foundation of the papal claim. The first was Matthew 16:18-19: ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven....’ The second was the command of Christ to Peter in John 21:16: ‘Feed my sheep.’”