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**The Social Impact of Martin Luther -**

**II**

**Lead: In 1525 the peasants of Germany took Martin Luther's teachings on spiritual equality to their logical conclusion and rebelled against the social structure of Germany. He was not amused.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts**

**Content: Because the Roman Catholic church was so closely allied with the social and political status quo, Luther's critique which he considered primarily spiritual and theological, took on a life of its own. Soon people began taking his words and applying to them a meaning he either did not intend or more probably in his early political naiveté,**

**did not anticipate. Once uttered, however, words have power and it is not always easy to govern how they will be used.**

**Since the medieval period, the peasants of Europe had periodically rebelled against the economic and social conditions that condemned them to a life of bitter destitution. The early 1500s noted a marked**

**deterioration of peasant circumstances in Germany. Crop failures in 1523 and 1524 made matters even worse and brought the situation to the brink of explosion.**

**Martin Luther's struggle against church authorities was popular among leaders anxious to diminish the power of the church, but in the countryside his teachings especially**

**had struck a responsive chord. When his tract *On Christian Liberty* (1520) was read out loud to a peasant population already on the edge of revolution the results were predictable. Taken alone the words, “A Christian man is the most free lord of all and subject to none,” became a powerful rallying cry. In 1525 leaders of peasant groups in**

**Swabia met and presented a series of demands. At first Luther supported the peasant's aspirations, but when armed and bloody revolt swept across Germany, the reformer drew back in horror at the whirlwind he had helped unleash. Next time: Poisonous, hurtful, devilish rebels.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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