THE DIET OF WORMS - Curated Transcript of BBC In Our Time podcast
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In Our Time is hosted by Melvyn Bragg. Melvyn's guests on this podcast are:

Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University;

David Bagchi, Lecturer in the History of Christian Thought at the University of Hull;

Reverend Dr Charlotte Methuen, Lecturer in Reformation History at the University of Oxford.

[Melvyn Bragg] Hello. Nestled on a bend of the river Rhine, in the southwest corner of Germany, is the city of Worms, or Vorms. It's one of the oldest cities in Central Europe. It still has its early city walls, its 11th century Romaness cathedral and a 500 year old printing industry. But in its center is a statue of a monk branded as a heretic, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther. In 1521, Luther came to Worms to explain his attack on the Catholic Church to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and the gathered dignitaries of the German lands. What happened at that assembly, called the Diet of Worms, was key to a movement which tore countries apart, set nation against nation, felled kings and plunged dynasties into suicidal bouts of infighting. But why did Martin Luther risk execution to go to the Diet? What was at stake for the big players of medieval Europe? And how did events of the Diet of Worms irrevocably change the history of Europe? With me to discuss the diet of worms are the Reverend Dr Charlotte Methuen, Lecturer in Reformation History at the University of Oxford, David Bagchi, Lecturer in the History of Christian Thought at the University of Hull, and Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University.

[Melvyn Bragg] Diarmaid MacCulloch, in the spring of 1521, Martin Luther, who had been excommunicated, answered the summons of his Emperor to explain his actions. He left the theology faculty at Wittenberg University for the city of Worms. Can you tell us why he went, and give us some flavor of the journey?

[02:6]
[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Well, happy days for Luther. This was a triumphal progress across the Empire. Suddenly he was a celebrity, and people crowded to see him. A priest touched the hem of his garment as he entered the city of Worms. And that gives you a flavor of although the fact these are happy days, they are also dangerous days. He is going up to Worms almost in the manner of Christ to his crucifixion, and he made that comparison. This is a journey on behalf of God, and it's a journey to present the case of truth to the Emperor at the most august assembly of the Empire.

[Melvyn Bragg] Having defied the Pope and called the Pope the Antichrist, which was one thing to do, and been excommunicated, he was sort of safe in Saxony as a ... professor of theology there. Why did he go?

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] He went first because he felt he had to. He had to present his message. He went because the Emperor had summoned him under a safe conduct. He went because he felt that he had to represent truth for God and perhaps die in the process. 100 years before, a man who had led a reformation in Bohemia had also had a safe conduct to a great assembly, an assembly of the Church, and had been burnt despite that safe conduct [Note: Jan Huss and the assembly at Constance]. So Luther realized that this was a tremendously dangerous situation, but he must go. He must leave the security of Saxony and believe that his patron, the Elector of Saxony, would keep him safe alongside the Emperor.

[Melvyn Bragg] The Elector of Saxony, Frederick III, also called Frederick the Wise, who plays a big role in this. But why had Luther fallen out so spectacularly with the Pope and given him such a hiding in the works he'd published?

[04:26]
[Diarmaid MacCulloch] The origin is something which is so central to Christianity that it's the issue about which you have to make a stand - how can you be saved? Luther called himself back to a theology, a way of thinking about salvation, which said that only God can save us, we cannot do anything for our salvation. The issue was about the [Roman Catholic Church] Indulgences, which were a way of saying to us that we can do something about our salvation. Luther had simply said what he felt any good Catholic Christian should say, that Indulgences were a cheat, that only God can save us, there's nothing we can do for our salvation. He'd said that message in public, and it seemed so obvious to him that no one could contradict it. But the Pope and the authorities of the Church had told him to shut up. And so the issue for him was salvation. The issue for the authorities was obedience, he had gone on proclaiming that message against constant commands from Rome to be quiet.

[Melvyn Bragg] But the Indulgence issue was a very powerful issue for the people and for Luther. Fundamentally, the Pope was saying, you can buy salvation if you pay me, the Pope, to in this case, to keep building St Peter's, in some cases to get off fasting in

Lent, and so on and so forth. The buying of salvation was something about which he was greatly indignant.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] That's right. And of course, in theory, it was much more complicated than that, the Indulgence doesn't buy you salvation, but that's how people thought of it, and that's how the sales campaign which had pushed this particular [St Peters Basilica] Indulgence had presented it. And Luther was outraged by that. You and I, he felt, and so had Paul before him in the Bible, cannot do anything for our salvation, least of all buy it. We are in the hands of God, so the Indulgence was an offense against God.

[Melvyn Bragg] So this stirred up. It was both political because he had the German princes on his side [because] nobody wanted to pay these things... So it went straight into the political sphere. David Bagchi, in 1520, the year before the Diet was called, it had been a very momentous year for Luther. He published three short books and got himself excommunicated. What did the books say, to take on from what Diarmaid said, to cause such offense? Diarmaid's mentioned the central thing, salvation, but can we go a little bit further?

[06:48]
[David Bagchi] Yes. These are the three treatises of 1520, which, strictly speaking, appear after the condemnation of the Papal Bull. So Luther is digging an even deeper hole for himself and finally buries himself in the eyes of the Pope by... burning the Papal Bull in December. But between June when the Bull comes out, and December when he burns it...

[Melvyn Bragg] The Papal Bull is...?

[David Bagchi] Sorry, the Papal Letter in this case of condemnation. And between those two dates, Luther produces three treatises, the first, in June, the Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation on the Reformation of the Church, which is exactly what it says. It's an appeal to the Emperor Charles V, the new emperor, the young emperor, which there are many hopes are being set, and Luther also joins in with this idea that this is the man, finally to reform the Church in Germany. What Luther does, very cleverly, is to combine a traditional criticism of the Church (which is of Rome, I should say) which is that it's been extracting money in very large amounts from German lands and combines that with a fairly solid theological grounding. So he's bringing together a political protest, for the first time, with a theological basis. The theological basis being that all attempts to reform the Church - to get rid of the abuses which are leading to the flow of money from Germany to Italy have failed because the Pope has surrounded himself with three walls. The first [wall] is that only the Pope can summon a council. Secondly, that only the Pope can interpret the Bible. And thirdly, most importantly perhaps, though it was first in his in his own order, that the Church teaches that the laity is a second class Christian.

[Melvyn Bragg] The two tier idea that if you are obviously if you're a pope, cardinal, bishop, monk, nun, you are automatically saved. If you're a layperson, you had to work for it or pay for it.

[David Bagchi] Yes, to the extent that in in some superstition circles, it was a good idea to if you were a layperson to be laid to rest in a coffin in a monk's cowl, this would somehow give you a safer passage.

[Melvyn Bragg] So what about the other [of these three short] treatises?

[David Bagchi] ...The second one was even more revolutionary. This was the Babylonian Captivity of the Church. It was an overarching criticism of the sacramental system of the Church. Luther radically pares down the number of sacraments of the Church from seven to two, or maybe three: baptism, eucharist, and perhaps confession. And again, he combines a radical theological critique of the sacraments with criticism of the abuses that the sacramental system has led to.

[Melvyn Bragg] And the ... final treatise.

[David Bagchi] And the final one, the most ironic of his treatises from December - The Freedom of a Christian, where Luther is answering objections to his doctrine of justification by faith alone and saying, there is a place in the Christian life for works, and it's an essential place, but works are not necessary for salvation.

[Melvyn Bragg] So this was obviously radical enough for not only the Bull, but then he was declared a heretic.

[David Bagchi] Yes.

[Melvyn Bragg] But that had to be confirmed by ... the emperor himself, the new young emperor (still in his teens) of the biggest Christian empire there had ever been, and this was the first Diet that he'd summoned, Charlotte Methuen. What did the Pope think of Luther going, as Diarmaid said, in such triumphant [procession] - because we have to keep this in our minds, that this man was traveling, it took him out a month... to travel across from Wittenberg to Worms. And it was a triumphal position [he was] received in cities with great dignity - this was a monk, [he] wasn't a king, an emperor, a bishop or anything, and away he went. So what did Pope Leo X, who was trying to raise masses of money to continue the building of St Peter's, ... think about this?

[11:16]
[Charlotte Methuen] I'm not sure we know really exactly what ...Pope Leo X was thinking about it, but I think what we do know is that his nuncio in Worms had very mixed feelings about, or had very mixed motives for, wanting Luther to be there or not to be there. On the one hand, the invitation to Luther to come was made, I think, in [the nuncio] Aleandro's understanding, ... on the grounds that if Luther came he would condemn himself out of his own mouth in Worms. And that was kind of contradicted by the triumphal passage that Luther had. But of course, they didn't know what the triumphful passage was going to look like when they invited Luther to come to Worms. So from that point of view, I don't think we can't judge by what they might have been thinking before.

[Melvyn Bragg] Why do you think it was such a triumphal passage? I mean, as that's been said by David, these treatises were quite complicated theologically, and so on. This man is in Wittenberg and yet all through Germany they are receiving him. They

were triumphal passage is used by Diarmaid to set the scene and ... you brought it up again, and I've mentioned it once or twice because you've all said it in your notes and books and that sort of thing. How did it spread so fast? This man from a very severe sect, Augustinian Edomites [?], after all, went through Europe like a conquering hero.

[12:38]
[Charlotte Methuen] Because I think he was touching a real nerve within, especially within, Germany. There was a lot of anti-papal feeling within Germany. There was not just worry concern about indulgences, there was huge worry about the fact that ... German church livings, were being given to Italian princes. That money that German princes, that German secular princes, felt ought to be flowing into their coffers, was actually flowing into the coffers of Rome, into the coffers of the church. And so I think there was a real sense amongst the political elite that things were seriously wrong financially. There was a real sense amongst the lay people that they were being asked to pay for something that they shouldn't have to pay for, a growing sense that there was something seriously wrong. And ... one of the reasons that Luther started writing in German, David didn't say, but the first and the Third Treatises in 1520 are written in German, now, that's quite extraordinary for an academic at the time to be writing in the vernacular. But one of the reasons Luther started to write in German is because his 95 thesis were translated illegally into German without his authorization. And in 1518 and 1519, he starts to write in German. And the printing press means that those writings can be spread very rapidly.

[Melvyn Bragg] The printing press is powerful.

[Charlotte Methuen] The printing press is powerful. The Protestants have the printing press. Most flugblaetter, pamphlets, which are being produced in Germany in the early 16th century are produced by Protestants - they're not called Protestants yet, but [they are people] who are supporting Luther's cause. And so it becomes a way of spreading his ideas. And they're spreading not just in the written world. There's amazing pictures, cartoons, caricatures of how churches look ... when an indulgence is being preached, which makes the connection between an indulgence being preached and Jesus going in and turning over the tables in the temple.

[Melvyn Bragg] So he defended the papacy and they thought that if they could get him to Worms under the new emperor,... he would confirm the decision that he was a heretic and he would be burnt. And they thought by coming there... but there's one man I want to key in here before you take the thing on. And this is Frederick the Wise, Frederick III, the Elector of Saxony, one of the seven electors who in fact had elected the new emperor, seven of them had, and he was a Roman Catholic, he was a protector of Luther. He was a great patron, long term patron of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach the Elder, an enigmatic man,

[Charlotte Methuen] ...a great collector of relics as well...

[Melvyn Bragg] Just to cut to the chase, why did he protect Luther as much as he did?

[Charlotte Methuen] Well, I think I'm not sure that it's specifically protecting Luther at the beginning, but one of the issues that Frederick one of the reasons why Frederick

agrees to vote for the emperor, for Charles V, is that he gets Charles V to agree that if he's elected Emperor, then he will assure the empire that nobody will be condemned without trial. So, in a sense, they've got to try Luther, because that's been one of the conditions of ...

[Melvyn Bragg] ...One of the deals.

[Charlotte Methuen] The election is full of deals. There's also a deal going on in 1519 during the election that Luther will not be tried just by canon lawyers, he must be tried by people who understand the issues.

[Melvyn Bragg] And this is, again, Frederick. What's he nosing in for in this, Frederick?

[Charlotte Methuen] Frederick wants the Elector to the Electors and the princes of the Empire to have more power.

[Melvyn Bragg] He is using Luther?

[Charlotte Methuen] He's using Luther. Yes. ...the Diet of Worms is part of a very long progress of diets which are about reforming the systems of the empire. So it's the culmination of a process which gives more power to the territorial princes, of whom the Electors are the most important, because the seven Electors elect the Emperor.

[Melvyn Bragg] Diarmaid, can you tell us? The diet had been running for several weeks - it ran from January until about June. ...It had been run for several weeks before Luther came...[and] it ran eventually for about six months. Can you give listeners an idea of what business was to be conducted over these six months, why it was so important?

[17:16]
[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Well, there is so much business at the time, apart from Luther, and one is the fact that Europe as a whole, apart from the Empire, is threatened by the Turks and there is a constant need to try and raise forces against the Turks, and they are a real threat. You might call this a clash of civilizations - it was [imagined] that Christendom might actually disappear and be overwhelmed by this great empire from the east. So that may have been the thing on most people's minds, certainly on the Emperor's mind, because the Emperor has a world-wide vision. He's got an empire in America, he's got frontiers to defend his Spain, not just the Empire,...

[Charlotte Methuen] And a war with France...

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] A war with France. So there are so many different issues, and yet Luther's issue sort of pushes its way through in this business - the issue of the obedience of one monk to the two great powers of medieval Europe, the Pope and the Emperor. Already this monk had defied one of those great powers, the Pope. Now, the great urgent question was, would he defy the Emperor as well? Would he stand up to this great universal figure of the medieval world?

[Melvyn Bragg] The great universal figure is 18 or 19 years old, isn't he? The new emperor.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] But the office is greater than the man

[Melvyn Bragg] I know. I'm not running him down. I'm just saying that it just adds to the occasion for me - that there you have this man of the greatest power in Christendom [who] is [just a] teenager.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] A teenager in the middle, devoutly, a son of the Church, hugely conscious of his universal role. He was told by his advisors that he may be the culmination of all time, he may be the man who will sort out the world ...he'll lead it to a new great reformation. Think of the responsibility for a rather serious minded, rather unimaginative, 19 year old.

[Charlotte Methuen] But also a 19 year old who speaks no German. And I think ... that's actually a really important point, that all that Charles is getting at the Diet has to be mediated through those who who can communicate with [some of the princes who are]... only-German-speakig.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Of course, he's speaking the language of the hated enemy - French! - [as he was] born and brought up in the Low Countries. So he speaks French in the Diet and everything has to be translated.

[Melvyn Bragg] We've got about 70 or 80 princes at this Diet and we have different sorts, independent people from cities in Germany, from principalities, of course, ...princes, bishops, archbishops and so on with their retinues. We have a massive gathering there and yet we're going to concentrate obviously on Luther here - the Turkish issue, the issue of titles of various sorts (this was Charles's chance to give out the deeds to new bishoprics) and that...

[Charlotte Methuen] Not only deeds..[the Emperor would] actually make the [bishopric and other] appointments, and that's important for Luther because it means that a lot of people with very high Church interests are there. And it also means that the whole issue about papal interest and whether or not these High Church positions are going to go to the German nobility or to the Italian nobility, they're very high on people's agendas. And that's important because I think it means that the anti-papal feeling amongst the princes is quite high.

[Melvyn Bragg] Can I cut, David Bagchi, to Luther. He turns up. What's the lineup for and against him in this assembly? ...Can you manage to encapsulate that?

[20:35]
[David Bagchi] It's not that easy to look back at the people who are there and to put them all into camps for or against - [although] it is certainly the case with some of them. The overall impression, certainly that Catholic observers such as the nuncio ... is that there's a great deal of support for Luther, but this is not ... blanket support. [Many people] support some aspects of what Luther has been saying, but not all. And the Revolutionary Treatises of 1520, that I mentioned, is the first sign that Luther's influence base is being eroded because he's going a bit too far for some people. The the idea of reform up until this time had been set very firmly within a mold set by Erasmus. That was to get rid of the abuses, but not to challenge any of the doctrinal

basis of the Church. And a lot of the deals going on at Worms were about how one separates out the good stuff in Luther and the bad stuff, condemning the bad stuff, but somehow preserving the truth of what he's saying.

[Melvyn Bragg] Diarmaid, can you take it? So he goes into this hall. They keep him waiting for most of the day, then towards the end of the day, he goes in to be questioned and tried. What happens then? Can we just concentrate on the event now for a few minutes?

[22:01]
[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Well, he's shown here a large part of his books and asked if he can defend ...

[Melvyn Bragg] Who is he confronted by? I mean, he's got these all these ambassadors and cardinals, all in [their] finary. He goes in in his monks robe, presumably.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Well, the Emperor is there, Aleander, the Pope's representative, is there to say that the electoral, the princes,

[Charlotte Methuen] the Archbishop of Trier is there, the Elector of Brandenburg, George of Saxony, who's an interesting person because he's Friedrick's cousin and he's very for Church reform, but he's very anti-Luther, Frederick of Baden, who becomes later...

[Melvyn Bragg] So they're all there.

[Charlotte Methuen] They're all there. So you've got some people there... there's a small group, a commission, that's been chosen to sort-of hear Luther's case, about half of whom are for him and about half of whom are more against him.

[Melvyn Bragg] So, coming back to you, Diarmaid, what happened?

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Well, there he is, confronted by his books as a way of showing what a heretic he is, and he simply admits they're all his ...

[Melvyn Bragg] And he is interrogated by one of his great intellectual opponents - that's eck, isn't it? He'd had a spat with [him] in Leipzig.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Yes, and, in effect, lost - Eck had managed to get him into a corner and made him identify with that Bohemian heretic of 100 years before, Jan Huss. And Luther had had to say Huss was not all bad, and that's a tantamount to admission of heresy.

[Charlotte Methuen] Councils could make a mistake, which also put some of the people who were for the consilient movement, for the idea that councils had the authority in the Church, off Luther.

[Melvyn Bragg] So he gets in, late afternoon, April 7, 1521, he's faced by all his books and by Eck and [...Eck?] says, "Did you write these books? Do you recant?" expecting,

wanting, a "yes and a yes and a yes" - I wrote these books and I recant". Instead of which, Luther said, "I want a day to think about this". Now, why did he say that?

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] I think because this is such an important moment of his life, he could face death by giving the wrong answer. Yes, he had written the books. Yes, he stood by them. And now, in effect, he's being asked to say, I was wrong and I wish to crave mercy from the church. And that's what he's got to think about. Could he say that? And in the end we find out the following day. He could not say that.

[Melvyn Bragg] So take us to the next day, then, Charlotte, as briefly ... as is decorous.

[Charlotte Methuen] Well, they come back the next day into a bigger hall. The second day is much bigger, a much bigger event. And that's when Luther makes his speech, which has often been characterized or caricatured as "here I stand, I can do no other". It's pretty clear he didn't say that. But the essence is that he said, yes, I do stand by this, and he expects it.

[Melvyn Bragg] I haven't got it in front of me. It was not honorable and not practical to go against your conscience. But it said, Here I stand on previous occasions, suddenly, never mind, that's what we remember it by. He didn't say it, but it's he didn't say there, but

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] He ... does seem to have said, "God help me. Amen". And that's expanded by one of his later biographies, about 40 years later, into the famous phrase, "Here I stand. I can do no other".

[Melvyn Bragg] But ...let's get on with that. We've got him in the hall and he's doing exactly what Eck didn't want him to do.

[Charlotte Methuen] Yes, exactly. And exactly what he must have thought would lead to him being burnt, because he has the expectation from Jan Huss that Jan Huss had not had his safe conduct honored...

[Melvyn Bragg] I'm sorry, I'm probably going on a bit too much ... but I think it's very important,...[Luther] addresses this large gathering in a way that Eck and those who are against him had maneuvered him into a position where they thought he could not possibly do this. But he did, he gave a great speech and defense of himself. Can you just give us a flavor of that? One of you? David, do you want to do this?

[David Bagchi] Luther's speech? ... He says, there are three types of books that have been presented that I'm being asked to recant. The first are books of Christian instruction and pious devotion which no Christian could possibly want to recant. The second are those which attack the exactions and claims of the Roman Papacy, which it would be dangerous to retract because that would be, in effect, to defend those same exactions. And the third category of book, this is where he gives away a little those written against defenders of the papacy, people like Eck, in fact. And these, perhaps, he says, I have written with more venom than befits my calling. But still, he then says, I'm not going to attract them. Even so, that's what he's left with. He doesn't step back at all.

[Charlotte Methuen] And he's quite clear that he says that if he can be shown to have spoken against scripture by use of scripture, then he's prepared to retract. But unless somebody can show him by use of scripture that he's spoken against scripture, then he stands by [it].

[Melvyn Bragg] And what was the reaction then that he'd said all this then and he concluded and what happened then?

[27:31]
[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Well, the Emperor now has to make a decision as to what to do. And Luther has been given a day to decide what to do. He has done it. Now the Emperor goes away and waits to make a decision. So we have yet another night at which the entire estates of Germany wait on one man to see what the future holds. Will the Emperor condemn him alongside the Pope? Will the Emperor then send him to the flames? Or will he not?

[Melvyn Bragg] Is there [a] further examination of Luther, then the Emperor decides? The emperor decides what? Let's finish the story. I mean, we know the ending, but it's nice to be told it.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] But the Emperor does a very honorable thing, but also a very decisive thing. He says two things. One is that Luther is now an outlaw of the Empire. ... He is a heretic. And the other thing he says is that still, Luther's safe conduct will be honored. He will leave the Diet without arrest. So it's a very odd situation.

[Melvyn Bragg] Back to Frederick the Wise, who we mentioned earlier in the program, the Elector of Saxony ... in which, at the University of Wittenberg, Luther was a professor of theology. He had an influence there, as I understand it, with the Emperor on that matter.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] Very much so. And the Elector is determined that Luther should survive and that's the pressure on the Emperor.

[David Bagchi] And more specifically, there's a promise which the Emperor has made to Frederick, that Luther will get a hearing by a panel of learned theologians and this has not happened yet. So what happens after these momentous events in public is a series of meetings that Luther has with a much smaller commission, which is made up very fairly of half pro Luther and half anti Luther, and they attempt to get him to recant by disputing with him. The papal party had been very clear that Luther was not going to be allowed to dispute publicly, to turn Worms into another Leipzig and get another public relations victory. So the disputation was going to carry on behind locked doors. This goes on for two, three days. But again, Luther does not retract anything that he said. And the thing fizzles out.

[Melvyn Bragg] And a twist in this strange and momentous event, Diarmaid, is that safe passage is granted, but it's just to the outskirts of the city of Worms and it ... need not apply afterwards. So Luther crosses a boundary, a geographical boundary, and he's kidnapped. People think it's either the Emperor or the Pope, but it's Frederick the Wise... He is literally kidnapped and taken to a castle and kept there for ten months...

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] This is the perfect solution, because there is no solution to this. Here is an outlaw. He ought to be arrested, and instead he disappears, kidnapped by who knows whom. Well, we know it was Frederick... But people at the time did not. And there's a vast astonishment in Germany. Where is Luther? And there he is, holed up in a castle, disguised as Junker Joerg.

[Charlotte Methuen] Writing the German New Testament.

[Melvyn Bragg] Living under a staircase. I mean, it really gets better and better, doesn't it? I mean, it's humor territory, this.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] This is, of course, when his constipation comes on, the famous constipation which is supposed to cause the Reformation. It's just being stuck in a castle. You would, wouldn't you?

[Melvyn Bragg] Well, under a staircase...Again, that's Frederick the Wise taking extreme measures to protect him. I'm fascinated that. Obviously, Luther is the main man in this discussion.... But Frederick the Wise did all this. Again, why did he do all this?

[David Bagchi] He was protecting himself at this point. Because one of the provisions, both of the Pope's condemnation and of the Edict of Worms, the Emperor's Proclamation, is that not only Luther as a heretic is now an outlaw, but also anyone who protects him, anyone who gives him succour, anyone who gives him shelter or food. Now, ... Luther knows eventually, he's going to go back into the protection of Frederick the Wise, but this cannot be publicly known. Frederick cannot afford that to be known, because otherwise he'd be in contempt of the Emperor and of the Diet. So Frederick is protecting Luther, certainly, but he's also protecting his own reputation as a loyal member of the Empire.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] I just find it very strange indeed. Why is Frederick doing this? Because he never implemented the Reformation in his life in Saxony. He allowed it to be implemented in certain towns in Saxony. But what is the motive?

[Melvyn Bragg] ...Charlotte?

[Charlotte Methuen] I think it is very confusing, but I think for Frederick, it's partly about territorial independence within Germany. The fact that Frederick, for instance, has not allowed the indulgences to be promulgated in Saxony, that was partly because he wanted to get his own money from similar practices, but he wouldn't allow that to happen. He wouldn't have the Papal Bull preached in Saxony. This is partly about Frederick the Wise being able to determine what happens in his own territory. And that seems to me to be one of the very fundamental results of the Diet of Worms, in fact, is that somehow, not in word and not in theory, but in practice, it has been established that a prince has that kind of religious power in his own territory.

[33:05]
[Melvyn Bragg] Let's now talk about the aftermath. One aftermath ... is that at this castle in which he was to which he was taken, he began to translate the Bible into German, which was a great event, a defining event. But how did what happened at

Worms play generally in the Empire? And what effect did it have on Luther? [Can we have] ...an overall view? So he goes from Worms, he's kidnapped. What does everybody say? What's happened there that people take on board?

[Charlotte Methuen] People have heard him speak. I mean, it's quite clear, for instance, that the person who's going to become the the Duke of Schleswig Holstein and later the the King of Denmark [(Christian III)] is profoundly influenced by what he's heard.

[Melvyn Bragg] So many people have heard [Luther's] message ...

[Charlotte Methuen] ...Because especially with this second condemnation where he makes this for the second day, where it's a much bigger room, they've ... packed a lot of people in. So people have heard him speak. There are a lot of merchants as well at Worms. It's not just a political event. It's also a sort-of trade event where people come together to find out what's going on. And so those people take ... Luther's message out into the Empire. So I think it's a profoundly - "a mission event", we would call it now.

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] But I think there's a much more profound result about this, and it's a great question which haunted Europe for the rest of the 16th century - for the next century or so [and this is] resistance or obedience? What Luther has now done at the diet of Worms is resist the two great powers of the medieval world the Pope, [and] now the Emperor. And you might say that he's obeying a basic biblical command - "it is better to obey God than man". That's a command in the Book of Acts. That you might say then is Luther's destiny, but over the next few years, he finds that obedience is actually something that God wants as well. When the peasants rebelled in 1525, Luther's reaction was that they had done something profoundly evil and that they must be suppressed, executed, tortured. And he suddenly realized there's another great biblical command "obey the powers that are there because they are ordained of God", Romans, Chapter XIII, Verse one. And you might say that the rest of the Reformation is a struggle between those two great principles: Obey God rather than man, but obey the powers that God has put there. And Luther, who's not a very logical man, has to battle with that for the rest of his life, and I must say, doesn't make a great success of it.

[35:30]
[David Bagchi] It must be said that Worms is in many ways the high point of Luther's life. And many of the biographers of Luther in the past have stopped there because this is a wonderful position where you have this unknown monk standing up, withstanding the the great powers of the Empire. After that he becomes a much less attractive person. He attacks Erasmus, he loses that support. After Wormss, he condemns the...peasants, as Diarmaid said.

[Melvyn Bragg] Can we stay with the peasants a bit? Because we're knowing going after that. You, Charlotte, call them the "farmers"... so explain why it's farmers and then let's discuss this idea that these people had been inspired by Luther. He was their hero...and they rose up... and he turned on them...

[Charlotte Methuen] Yeah, exactly. I call them farmers. I think it's a better translation of the "Bauer" than the peasants, which rather makes you think of the sort of the

underlings. And these were yeoman farmers. These are people who probably quite often own land or have some kind of title to land, but they have no political representation whatsoever. It's very noticeable that they are not represented at the Diet. There's no way that they can have their voice heard. And so these are people with a justifiable political ... complaint. And they find in Luther's message the idea that "I can, through reading the Bible myself, can understand my salvation, can understand how I might be inspired to discover what God wants for me". They discover in that a message of revolt, of rebellion. And the farmers uprising, as I tend to call it (as opposed to "the peasant's war) ... is partly inspired, no doubt at all. It's partly inspired by Luther's theology. You see that in their statements.

[Melvyn Bragg] So what was the consequence of his condemnation? What did it do for his reputation and what did it do for their movement?

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] I'd say huge disappointment. Vast disappointment. You can say the Reformation reaches a real crisis in 1525-6, because those ...country people who heard that exciting message suddenly found that, in a sense, they'd been let down. And much of the rest of the story of the Reformation is the way in which either it's going to be a spirited Reformation revolution or is it going to be led by magistrates, by princes. Luther's point - why he condemned those farmers (Charlotte's absolutely right about that correction there) is that these people have not been ordained by God to rule. They have no right to assert themselves politically. That was their crime against God, and only princes can rebel against other princes. So resistance is a matter of God telling authorized people to rebel.

[Melvyn Bragg] But this isn't very much in contradiction with his idea that priesthood could be bestowed on anyone if a group of people landed on an island and elected someone - "in or out of wedlock", he said.

[Charlotte Methuen] ...Although Luther is trying to say there is no division between ecclesiastical and secular as far as your access to salvation is concerned, he still doesn't want to say that ecclesiastical freedom breaks down secular hierarchies. And so ... the theology of order, is very, very important for Luther. It's not it's not just after 1525. It's already there in in embryo, I would say, in 1520. The whole idea that he expands in "The Freedom of the Christian" is that if you're a shoemaker, if you're called by God to be ... the best shoemaker you can be. If you're called by God to be a preacher, you're called by God to be the best preacher you can be, but it doesn't give you better access to salvation.

[Melvyn Bragg] Right. David, you were taking us on the downward track of Luther, so we've had the peasant's revolt. And after that ...

[39:33]
[David Bagchi] Yes, I was going to mention, of course, his infamous anti- Jewish writings ...

[Melvyn Bragg] That's in 1543...

[David Bagchi] ...Towards the end of his life... Before that, he writes a treatise which is which is very much phylo-semitic, but that as he becomes disillusioned, perhaps, but

certainly as he expects the imminent end of the world and expects... Jews to convert on mass to Christianity, and it hasn't happened. He gets very frustrated at that.

[Melvyn Bragg] He writes, as I as I understand it, a violent, antisemitic book which was taken up by, pushed into print again, by the Nazis and used extensively.

[David Bagchi] That's right, yes. Luther was idolized by the Nazis, not just as a German hero, but also for his, and perhaps particularly for his, anti Semitic writings. Luther did not envisage the concentration camps, but certainly he called for the burning of Jewish homes and businesses. He was used as a blueprint for the 1930s.

[Melvyn Bragg] Sorry.... can we come back finally, as we're coming towards the end of this program, which is a pity, there you go. Can we come back ... to the theological question, Diarmaid? What was the big theological shift which then, as it were, underlay so much that happened over the next centuries in various complicated political and theological battles, not just in Europe but around the world? Can you just try to summarize that for us?

[Diarmaid MacCulloch] The one great success in Luther's career is to establish a basic principle about the Western form of Christianity in its Protestant form - and that is justification by faith alone, a technical term. What it means is you and I cannot do anything for our salvation. God does it all. We are given a gift of faith by God in his word. That is the only route to salvation. that remains at the basis of Protestantism, and it's a great liberating thing, because it means you're not caught up in desperately trying to do things for salvation. Gives you a big problem, because you then ask, well, why should I bother being good? Or perhaps more important, why should I bother not being bad if God is going to do it all for me? And that's a troubling little question for all Protestants, but this remains the principle of Protestantism and it is liberating because it leaves you alone in front of God. And I think even as Christianity may have been stripped away from ... much of Western culture, that remains the distinctive product of the Reformation. You and I are individuals in front of our fate. We may call that fate God, but that is at the center of the achievements of Western civilization over the last 400 years.

[Melvyn Bragg] ... Well, I thought that was terrific!... Thank you very much to Diarmaid MacCulloch, David Bagchi and Charlotte Methuen.
