

The Edict of Worms at the Diet of Worms (1521)

A 'diet' is a political meeting to make a decision. The Diet of Worms was a hearing in the Holy Roman Empire (Germany and surrounding areas) held in Worms. Martin Luther's defense at this hearing is called his Edict of Worms.

A [Dr. Ecken:] . . . Do you wish to defend the books which are recognized as your work? Or to retract anything contained in them? . . .

B [Luther:] Most Serene Lord Emperor, Most Illustrious Princes, Most Gracious Lords . . . I beseech you to grant a gracious hearing to my plea, which, I trust, will be a plea of justice and truth; and if through my inexperience I neglect to give to any their proper titles or in any way offend against the etiquette of the court in my manners or behavior, be kind enough to forgive me, I beg, since I am a man who has spent his life not in courts but in the cells of a monastery; a man who can say of himself only this, that to this day I have thought and written in simplicity of heart, solely with a view to the glory of God and the pure instruction of Christ's faithful people. . . .

C . . .Your Imperial Majesty and Your Lordships: I ask you to observe that my books are not all of the same kind.

In the first group of books, I deal with piety in faith and morals with such simplicity and so agreeably with the Gospels that even my opponents admit they are useful, harmless, and clearly worth reading by a Christian. Even the Pope's Papal Bull, harsh and cruel though it is, calls some of my books harmless, although it cruelly judges and condemns them...

D The second group of books consists of writings against the papacy, and against those who by their evil doctrines have destroyed Christians by doing harm to their souls and bodies. No one can either deny this, for universal experience and world-wide grievances are witnesses to the fact that through the Pope's laws and through man-made teachings the consciences of Christians have been sadly ensnared, troubled, and tormented, and also that their goods and possessions have been taken (especially in this famous German nation) by unbelievable tyranny, and are still being shamefully devoured; and the Pope's laws and doctrines which are contrary to the Gospel or the teachings of the Fathers are to be considered as wrong. If then I recant these, it would only add strength to such tyranny, to open not the windows but the main doors to such blasphemy...

E The third kind consists of those books which I have written against private individuals, so-called; against those, that is, who have exerted themselves in defense of the Roman tyranny and to the overthrow of that piety which I have taught. I confess that I have written too harshly. For I am not trying to be a saint...But it is not in my power to recant them, because that would give that tyranny and blasphemy power over Christians...more violently than ever.

F However, since I am a man and not God, I can only defend my writings the same way my Lord Jesus Christ did. When He had been interrogated concerning His teaching..., He said: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil." If the Lord Himself, who knew that He could not err, did not refuse to listen to witness against His teaching, even from a worthless slave, how much more ought I, scum that I am, capable of much error, to seek and to wait for any who may wish to bear witness against my teaching.

G And so, through the mercy of God, I ask Your Imperial Majesty, and Your Illustrious Lordships, or anyone of any degree, to defeat them by the writings of the Prophets or by the Gospels; for I shall be most ready, if I be better instructed, to recant any error, and I shall be the first in casting my writings into the fire. . . .

H [Dr. Ecken:] You have not answered the question! Do you recant, or do you not!!!

I [Luther:] Your Imperial Majesty and princes want a simple answer. Here it is, truthful and straightforward. Unless I am convinced of error by the testimony of Scripture, not of popes or councils, since they have so often contradicted themselves...I stand convicted by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is captive to God's word, I cannot, I will not recant... On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

1) After his introduction, what does Luther say was the two purposes of his writing (B) ? _____

2) What does Luther say about the Pope's views on his books (C)? _____

3) What is the main point of his second set of books (D)? _____

4) What is the main point of his third set of books (E)? _____

5) In what way does Luther relate his situation to that of Jesus (F)? _____

6) Under what conditions will Luther 'cast his writings into the fire' (G)? _____

How does the trial come to an end (H and I)? _____

