

Martin Luther Freeing Christians

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The Protestant reformation was likely the most important event in European history. Caused by a series of events, but many claim the foundational basis to be propelled by Martin Luther's infamous 95 theses.¹ Luther's statements were fairly easy for the common people to side with. Reflecting some modern views, like Calgary's voters belief in regards to building a sports arena for our hockey team Luther questions the Pope "Again; why does not the pope, whose riches are at this day more ample than those of the wealthiest of the wealthy build one Basilica of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with that of poor believers?"² Money comes up quite often in his theses, and as Luther repetitively points out the Church has no lack of funding. He is stating that the Pope is taking advantage of his position to goad citizens into paying for the redemption of their sins. This is putting a belief that the wealthier people have a better and quicker access to salvation as they were also able to pay away time in purgatory. Or even able to buy the ability to sin. After Luther came forward with his 95 theses the Pope and Rome were distracted with politics. This allowed for Luther to push his message forward before the Church was able to offer up an official response.³ The resting Pope, Leo the tenth issued a statement called the *Exsurge Domine* in retort to Luther's 95 theses but he countered with only 41 condemnations against Luther's letter. Luther was then called to Rome to recant his writings or else he would be punished with excommunication. Although all this seemed to accomplish was simply just confirming everything that Martin had believed.⁴ This becomes a defining moment as now Martin Luther feels vindication from within his writings. Not just for himself but

¹ Curt Cadorette, *Catholicism in Social and Historical Contexts* 124

² Martin Luther's, *95 Theses*, 86

³ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 216-217

⁴ Berndt Hamm, *Luther's Freedom of a Christian and the Pope* 250-251

for all those against the Church and the Pope. This was easily conveyed when he and his followers publicly burned the Pope's *Exsurge*.⁵ In the Pope's only writing directly against Martin Luther's arguments, the Pope not just showed the current nature of the Church but even subtly offered support to dear Luther, "Christians must be taught to cherish excommunications rather than to fear them."⁶ The new orientation Christians instilled in their lives from here on out have impacted the modern world so greatly that the Catholic Church seemingly was withholding the individual's greatest potential.

Martin Luther's 95 theses begins by condemning the Church's act on the Pope redeeming sins of the people before reaching God. He talks about living and nonliving Christians who are hoping to reach salvation, the ultimate goal. The Pope is extorting the fear of the commoner of never achieving salvation to persuade the people into giving the Church their money.⁷ This was something that Luther himself had strong empathy for. Shortly after he became an ordained priest he had what he believed were trials of his spirit. During his studies he would become a victim of spells of depression and anguish that he believed came from his self guilt.⁸ Eventually Luther finds his saving grace in the meaning of "the justice of God." His realization is that in terms of salvation, it did not matter his actions being holy or not. What was determining his ability to achieve salvation was only in the greatness of God.⁹ This forever remains in the back of his mind through his days. Eventually this confidence is mirrored against the Pope after his

⁵ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 219

⁶ *Exsurge Domine* - Reason 24

⁷ Martin Luther, *Ninety-Five Theses*

⁸ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 210

⁹ *Ibid.* 211

excommunication. Likely mirroring the new common belief regarding the Pope, Luther by 1520 no longer believed the Pope had any authority to send him to Hell.¹⁰

The Church's initial response to Martin Luther was ultimately their undoing. First simply sending Luther a letter that did not acknowledge his document and put time writing in a few derogatory lines about the Augustinian Monk. This allowed for Luther to spread his message and have public debates, gaining much appeal to the German population.¹¹ Pope Leo X eventually released a document in response to Martin Luther in 1520 titled *Exsurge Domine* which called for Luther to defend himself by recanting his writings or face excommunication. Pope Leo seemingly walking around the points Luther was making, while affirming them. "Indulgences are necessary only for public crimes, and are properly conceded only to the harsh and impatient."¹² It seems fairly easy to argue that the Pope is conceding that the Church is making case by case decisions, which is not something they should have the power to decide. The response from the Church was not received well because of the misconception of the meaning in Luther's writing. The papal bull *Exsurge* seemed to be missing the mark for explaining the concerns brought up.¹³ What is a consistent point made by Luther that the public agreed on was the corruption within the Church. Most importantly he argued people must not think that their salvation is determinant on what the Church has decided for them.

¹⁰ Curt Cadorette, *Catholicism in Social and Historical Contexts* 124

¹¹ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 217-218

¹² *Exsurge Domine* - Line 21

¹³ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 220

Although Pope Leo X excommunicated Martin Luther from the Catholic Church he was vindicated by the people. Charles V, the new Emperor of Rome banned the writings of Martin Luther; Protestant Churches were being put up against the old churches, and his message still managed to spread across all of Europe.¹⁴ Not only was his message heard across the land but it seemed the majority of people who heard it were in favour of a reformation.¹⁵ As the reformation went through Europe people fond of the idea added on their own influence to better the new religion. Ideas that are likely tailored to favour their own community, they did help spark the revolution in their area. This is fairly important because what would help Protestants expand would be taken on as the main religion by a country's monarchy.¹⁶ One's faith had a tremendous impact on their lives. This factor was a catalyst of the transition. In Luther's home country of Germany, towns were converting from Catholic to Protestant in months after his proposed reforms. There was so much hatred to the Catholic Church that their churches were vandalized and degraded.¹⁷ These acts were outward expressions of what Martin Luther expressed, that they were no longer scared of the Pope or the Church. Clear anger to demean their sacred places instead of just repurposing or even smelting the material. The common people have felt betrayed, they have been watching the wealthy buy their way into heaven.¹⁸ The anger of the people has been fended off by the Church by the fear of God. Martin Luther's tribulations over his salvation were on the minds of all people. Now not scared of what the Pope has to say people are fleeing their shackles in belief of a better life available.

¹⁴ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 221-222

¹⁵ Thomas A. Fudge, *In Praise of Heresy* 27

¹⁶ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 222

¹⁷ Curt Cadorette, *Catholicism in Social and Historical Contexts* 125

¹⁸ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 215 - He talks about how the Church is manipulating people, shouting for money in crowds reminding them of their relatives trapped in the flames of purgatory. Making it seem like Hell and they can save them by paying up.

Martin Luther did remain consistent in the principles of his writings being based on freedoms. The liberty of a people is always seen as a positive impact when we look back on history, and even in the Bible do we have people being freed by God. In the *Exsurge Domine* the Pope confirms that the people need not their Priest's forgiveness of sins. They were now capable of detaching away from the Church which swindled them so. "Sins are not forgiven to anyone, unless when the priest forgives them he believes they are forgiven;"¹⁹ The Protestants are now taking the lead of Martin Luther, unafraid of the Pope and their salvation as they believe that with pure morals they will still be brought into the afterlife by God. This would lead to massive social change all over Europe. This was most effectively campaigned by Monarchs. The Tudor house of England maintained a Catholic rule over England. This changed however when political conflict eventually led to the Protestant Queen Elizabeth who established England as a Protestant nation.²⁰

This time period caused a lot of religious change. Most importantly was the new Christian idea on how gaining salvation works. Before there was an impediment from the Catholic Church, who were taking money to set up parishes and getting peasants to pay to get their loved ones out of purgatory, and giving a sellable way out of sins. The Protestants now believed that they were individually able to decipher moral dilemmas for themselves based on scripture.²¹ Of course this made them in charge of their own standard, one we see today still is in work ethic. Sociologist Max Weber, credited the Protestant work ethic as the beginning reason

¹⁹ *Exsurge Domine* - Line 10. Meaning behind this line is that the Church is not forgiving sins. What they are doing is being an outlet for someone to confess to.

²⁰ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 222 - The Queen ruled for nearly 50 years promoting Protestants over Catholics which started plenty of dialogue

²¹ Curt Cadorette, *Catholicism in Social and Historical Contexts* 126

for what started the industrial revolution, which in turn advanced society faster than ever before.

²² The end goal of all people remained the same but the means of achieving it has changed to them. Instead of needing to appease anyone in the Church's authority they could focus simply on their own lives. The poor people who detested the Church shared Martin Luther's "intensified awareness of freedom" and used this realization to improve their lives, and seemingly mirrors the all for liberty attitude of America's expansion in the coming centuries by Europe.²³

What has been uncovered from examining the conflict that began the Protestant reformation was the forced acknowledgement that there was corruption in the Church. They were using the fear of unknown afterlife to control the people and gain more power. Martin Luther, who was an Augustinian monk who became scared in prayer, causing depression in regards to his worries on his salvation. Realizing finally that salvation was not to be determined by the Holy order but only by God himself.²⁴ This led to him directly questioning the Church on their hypocritical practices. The Pope would not back down. Perhaps unintentionally uniting Christians. Flipping the switch on what determines the ability to enter the afterlife. People were now inspired. Instead of giving up their bread crumbs to the Church they would save them, and make use. This slow accumulation of wealth showed the people how much more capable they really were. Now, all Christians are able to walk with their back straight, and confident that as long as they make proper use of their time, they will make God happy, maybe even impress him. People are now more willing to suffer for not just their own future, but others because they

²² Dr. Linda Henderson, *Founding Fathers: Max Weber* - Advancing all over, especially medicine and social laws

²³ Berndt Hamm, *Luther's Freedom of a Christian and the Pope* 251

²⁴ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 210-211

believe that their salvation depends on their own actions, not what the Church knows. The Catholic Church has wildly changed since Vatican 2. Maybe when we ask if these two Churches will ever make amends we should ask on how the Catholic Church can make it up to the Protestants.

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