

Martin Luther, Part 2

Historical Theology

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I. 95 THESES

This is just a sampling of quotes from Martin Luther's "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," more familiarly known as, "The 95 Theses." The bullet numbers refer to the number of the theses being quoted.

A) PURPOSE

Martin Luther, Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences, Introduction

"[Martin Luther], intends to defend the following statements and to dispute on them [at Wittenberg University]. Therefore he asks that those who cannot be present and dispute with him orally shall do so in their absence by letter."

B) WHAT IS REPENTANCE

Martin Luther, Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

C) PURGATORY IS FALSE

Martin Luther, Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences

10. Those priests act ignorantly and wickedly who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penalties for purgatory.
11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept (Mt 13:25).
12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.

D) CONSEQUENCES OF SELLING INDULGENCES

Martin Luther, Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences

39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.
40. A Christian who is truly contrite seeks and loves to pay penalties for his sins; the bounty of indulgences, however, relaxes penalties and causes men to hate them -- at least it furnishes occasion for hating them.

E) INDULGENCES SUBORDINATE TO CHRIST

Martin Luther, Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences

62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.
63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last (Mt. 20:16).
64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.
65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.
66. The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.
67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.

II. THE CHURCH RESPONDS

A) LUTHER GOT HIS WISH TO DEBATE THESE TOPICS, SORT OF

1. Archbishop Albrecht did not respond to Luther. Instead he had Luther's document inspected for heresy then forwarded to Rome
2. The took a lot of time to respond. In fact he strung it out over 3 years with various different Church representatives arguing why Luther was not only wrong but an enemy of the Pope and the Church in various different forums.

3. They hoped to badger Luther into backing down, but instead they just hardened his resolve because they continued to argue that the Pope could do as he pleased because he was the Pope, and Luther responded by declaring that the Pope was not above scripture.
4. On June 15, 1520 the Pope issued an edict (papal bull) threatening Luther with excommunication if he did not recant 41 specific statements from various of his writings within 60 days.
5. On December 10, 1520 Luther burned the documents from the Pope and published a book explaining his actions. He was excommunicated on January 3, 1521

B) DIET OF WORMS

1. Luther was ordered to appear before the Diet of Worms of the Holy Roman Empire on April 18, 1521. Here he faced Johann Eck who again called for Luther to recant his statements. This is where Luther unequivocally declared that he would recant but only if Eck used scripture to prove Luther's his errors.
2. The emperor issued the Edict of Worms on May 25, 1521 declaring Luther an outlaw, banning his works, making it a crime to assist Luther and saying further that no one who killed Luther would face prosecution.

III. WARTBURG CASTLE

A) "KIDNAPPING" OF MARTIN LUTHER

Prince Edward III, elector of Saxony, and friend of Luther had secured promise of safety for Luther to the Diet of Worms, but he had a backup plan when that failed. Some of his men staged a kidnapping of Luther and hid him in Wartburg castle from May, 1521 until March, 1522.

B) LUTHER'S "PATMOS"

Luther referred to this period as, "my Patmos." While sequestered at Wartburg he completed a translation of the New Testament from Greek to German and wrote many documents refuting errors in Catholicism especially the sale of indulgences.

He also wrote corresponded with some colleagues in which he further developed and explained doctrines of salvation through faith, the futility of attempting to be justified by works, etc.

In his "Letter to Melanchthon," he wrote, "Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides."

IV. PEASANTS' REBELLION

A) "REFORMATION" AT WITTENBERG

While Luther was shut up in Wartburg some of his colleagues were running with his ideas and developing some of their own. This was led by two of Luther's colleagues Andreas Karlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling. The common people were becoming increasingly agitated against the abuses of Catholicism and the nobility who supported Catholicism.

B) ZWICKAU PROPHETS

When a radical group called the Zwickau prophets arrived the people were ready for revolution, armed if need be, and the Prophets were ready to encourage them. At this point the town council reached out to Luther to see if he would or could help calm things down.

C) RETURN TO WITTENBERG

Luther decided it was his duty to face the risk and return to Wittenberg to try to promote a peaceful and Biblically faithful reformation. Beginning March 9, 1522 he preached 8 sermons in 8 days using the Bible to lay a foundation of core Christian values among the people. Among his core values were: love, patience, charity, freedom and that Scripture not violence was the power Christians should trust for reformation.

In one of these sermons he stated, "Do you know what the Devil thinks when he sees men use violence to propagate the gospel? He sits with folded arms behind the fire of hell, and says with malignant looks and frightful grin: 'Ah, how wise these madmen are to play my game! Let them go on; I shall reap the benefit. I delight in it.' But when he sees the Word running and contending alone on the battle-field, then he shudders and shakes for fear."

D) THE PEASANTS' REBELLION BEGINS

Luther was successful in quelling the radical and insurrectionist views at Wittenberg, but as he expelled bad actors from Wittenberg they spread their ideas through the rest of Germany over the next 4 years with small insurrections and rebellions popping up. With time they increased in size and number eventually turning into a real war with the common people and some nobles on one side and the Pope's supporters on the other. The commoners thought Luther would support them. While he did sympathize with many of their grievances he opposed their methods, and actually advocated for governmental authorities to use appropriate force to put an end to the rebellions.

E) LUTHER'S POSITION

Luther had 3 points of issue: 1st the rebels were in violation of Jesus' and Paul's instructions to submit to governing authorities, 2nd they were using means outside of allowance by scripture and thus made themselves subject to execution as common criminals, and 3rd by claiming Christ while violating point 2 these rebels were committing blasphemy.

F) THE END OF RADICAL REFORMATION?

With Luther's support clearly removed the rebellions quickly fell apart having been mostly brought to an end by May 1525.

Luther was not happy with the conclusion writing in 1526, "I, Martin Luther, have during the rebellion slain all the peasants, for it was I who ordered them to be struck dead." He clearly felt that he had a level of responsibility for both the starting of the insurrections and encouraging the authorities to use force to swiftly end them.

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