

Martin Luther and the Process of Condemnation

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The ideas and teachings of Martin Luther were unequivocally condemned by the Church, as they publicly refuted its authority and integrity. Martin Luther did this through various published treatises criticising the Catholic Church's theological and ethical basis for selling indulgences. Another instance in which Martin Luther contested the supremacy of the Catholic Church was through contesting the theological position of the Church's embodied earthly representative Pope Leo X. Martin Luther challenged the authority of Pope Leo X through personal conversations among colleagues and through published treatises that were undoubtedly opposed to the authority, though evidently not of the personal character of Pope Leo X. These two instances in which Martin Luther challenged the sovereignty of the Catholic Church, led to intense persecution by Church officials, specifically Eccius, and Cajitan. This exposed Martin Luther to the resentment of many other officials within the Catholic Church, and was thus publicly condemned.

Martin Luther in the *95 Thesis*, and in his letter to the *Archbishop of Mainz* in 1517, openly stated his position against the Holy Roman Church's selling of indulgences as the funds from these sales were invested in the building of St Peters. The marketing of indulgences gravely distressed Martin Luther, as people were led to believe that they were now sure of their salvation, with no outward repentance necessary. Luther writes in the *95 Thesis* (Luther, 1996, p. 1), "*such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh*". He thought it was useless to repent if it produced insignificant change in the life of the person concerned. Furthermore, indulgence preachers insisted that no sin was beyond forgiveness, and while this is completely correct, the purchase of an indulgence was also said to have freed the participant from all guilt involved. However, Martin Luther was convinced that salvation could not be obtained through riches, and did not free the participant from the guilt of sin.

“I have no longer been able to keep quiet about this matter, for it is by no gift of a bishop that man becomes sure of salvation... Christ never taught that indulgences should be preached” (Luther, 1996, p. 1-2).

Additionally, acquiring salvation through monetary payment meant that participants needed wealth in order to obtain indulgences. This meant that salvation was starting to become exclusive to the wealthy. The *95 Thesis* suggests this grieved Martin Luther as he was certain salvation should never have been limited to the wealthy, as it was not the teaching of the Catholic Church prior to this time, nor was it the teaching of Christ to exclude the poor from salvation. Nevertheless Martin Luther’s teachings against the Church’s selling of indulgences were condemned, as they were contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Martin Luther did this by refuting the character and belief of all preachers sold and agreed with the theological basis for the sale of indulgences. He went on to say:

“St. Lawrence said that the poor of the church were the treasures of the church, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.”

Thus those indulgences preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved of from every penalty [even guilt] and saved by papal indulgences” (Luther, 1992, p. 4).

Comments of this nature provoked increasing anger from within the Catholic Church.

Martin Luther was further persecuted by the Church, as his works explicitly discredited Papal authority. Similarly, Martin Luther in his work *On The Freedom of a Christian*, expresses his discontent at Pope Leo X being the only one ultimately qualified to interpret divine scripture. *“They are in error, who attribute to you alone the right of interpreting divine Scripture”* (Luther, 1998, p. 5). Furthermore, in the *95 Thesis* Martin Luther questioned the Pope’s action in declaring partial remission of sins, as well as his ability to pardon personal guilt of his own endowed authority. Martin Luther confirms this in the *95 Thesis*: *“The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and*

showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven” (Luther, 1992, p. 1). Luther’s discontent was warranted as the Pope’s policy instilled fear within the hearts of the people, as this policy caused commoners to feel as though they may still face possible purgatory.

Martin Luther in the *95 Thesis* also alerted the Pope and the Church to the Pope’s arrogance in trusting in salvation being purchased monetarily through the buying of an indulgence: *“It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary, or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security”* (Luther, 1992, p. 3). Moreover, the *95 Thesis* suggests Martin Luther also severely disliked the Pope’s action of portraying himself to the public as Christ himself, instead of the simply symbolic earthly representation of Christ’s presence within the Church, with the privilege of interceding for the sins of others, not remitting them:

“The pope does very well when he grants remission to souls in purgatory, not by the power of the keys, which he does not have, but by way of intercession for them” (Luther, 1992, p. 2).

Hence Martin Luther was petitioning Pope Leo X to simply appropriate his ordained role as Christ’s physical embodiment within the Church, not to personify himself as Christ.

Furthermore, sources suggest Martin Luther was similarly hostile to the Pope’s ignorance regarding the difficulties and questions of the Church lay regarding the selling of indulgences. For instance: *“Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial”* (Luther, 1992, p. 5). Additionally, the Pope’s actions concerning his suppression of lay comment through violence enraged Martin Luther as it meant that valid questions went unnoticed by the Pope and the Church (Luther, 1992, p. 5). Therefore, every instruction and teaching of Martin Luther

concerning the Pope and his power was condemned by the Church as these claims shamed the repute and conduct of the Catholic Church.

Two instances in which Martin Luther challenged the sovereignty of Pope Leo X and the integrity of the Catholic Church resulted in severe persecution from Church officials, namely John Eccius and Cardinal Cajitan. Consequently, this exposed Martin Luther to the wrath of the Catholic Church. Martin Luther in his work "*On The Freedom of a Christian*" describes John Eccius listening into a personal conversation between Martin Luther and a colleague concerning the sovereignty of Pope Leo X. John Eccius reported this conversation to the leaders of the Catholic Church, exposing Martin Luther to further scrutiny.

"John Eccius...would dare all things for the glory of God, and for the honor of the holy apostolic seat...he looked forward with all certainty to victory; seeking to promote, not so much the primacy of Peter, as his own pro-eminence among the theologians of this age..." (Luther, 1998, p. 3).

Furthermore, the objective of John Eccius was for a seat within the Roman Court for himself. Thus the publicity John Eccius received through exposing Martin Luther to the antagonism of the Catholic Church would certainly have been beneficial to his own repute among officials within the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Cajitan also initiated further bias toward Martin Luther from the Catholic Church. Cardinal Cajitan berated Martin Luther by withholding forgiveness from Martin Luther when Luther was confessing to him. Martin Luther in his written work "*On The Freedom of a Christian*" writes of admitting to Cajitan that he would quiet himself in order to avoid persecution. This agreement was made on the condition that Cajitan would also instruct Martin Luther's persecutors to do the very same thing. However, Martin Luther confirms that Cajitan did not do this. Instead, Cardinal Cajitan validated the claims of Martin Luther's persecutors through issuing them "*free license*," and instructed

Martin Luther to admit all prior claims as a disgrace (Luther, 1998, p. 4). Martin Luther writes of this experience in his treatise “*On The Freedom Of A Christian*” :

“Thus indeed, when the case was in the best position it came through his [Cardinal Cajitan’s] vexatious tyranny into a much worse one” (Luther, 1998, p. 4).

In addition to this, it was outside of Cardinal Cajitan’s authority and pastoral role to expose Martin Luther to this form of attack. This allowed the Papal Court unrestricted access to harass Martin Luther and his theology as it was contradictory to the sovereignty of Pope Leo X and the Catholic Church.

The teachings of Martin Luther were condemned by the Church because they publicly questioned the integrity and the sovereignty of the Catholic Church. Martin Luther’s immense discontent was specifically with the Church’s selling of indulgences, and with the authority of the Church’s embodied earthly representative Pope Leo X. Martin Luther contested Church authority through private conversation, and through published treatises. The two personal conversations in which Martin Luther challenged the standing and power of the Church and Pope Leo X resulted in intense persecution, particularly from John Eccius and Cardinal Cajitan, consequently exposing Martin Luther to profound resentment and discrimination from the Church.

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