



Welcome to ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

DISCUSSING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DISCUSSED



**FR. JARED WICKS, S.J.
ST. BLAISE
STERLING HEIGHTS, MI
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2017**

Introduction

Fr. Randy Phillips

(Due to a problem with the sound system, Fr. Phillips' Introduction was not clear enough to be transcribed.)

Martin Luther: 500 Years Legacy

Fr. Jared Wicks, S.J.

Some people across the water have been going through a Luther decade to prepare for the celebrations of October 31, coming up 6 weeks from today.

Here our preparation is shorter, but I hope we can make it intense and a leap in understanding the figure of Martin Luther in the history of the Church; and yes in the history of Christian spirituality, which is the perspective that I have used from very early on, when I was doing my doctoral studies in Muenster, Germany, and followed Martin Luther through his earliest works with the eye on the dynamics of the Christian life that he set forth to teach— not his own personal spirituality, but the spirituality that was conveyed in the vast number of publications.

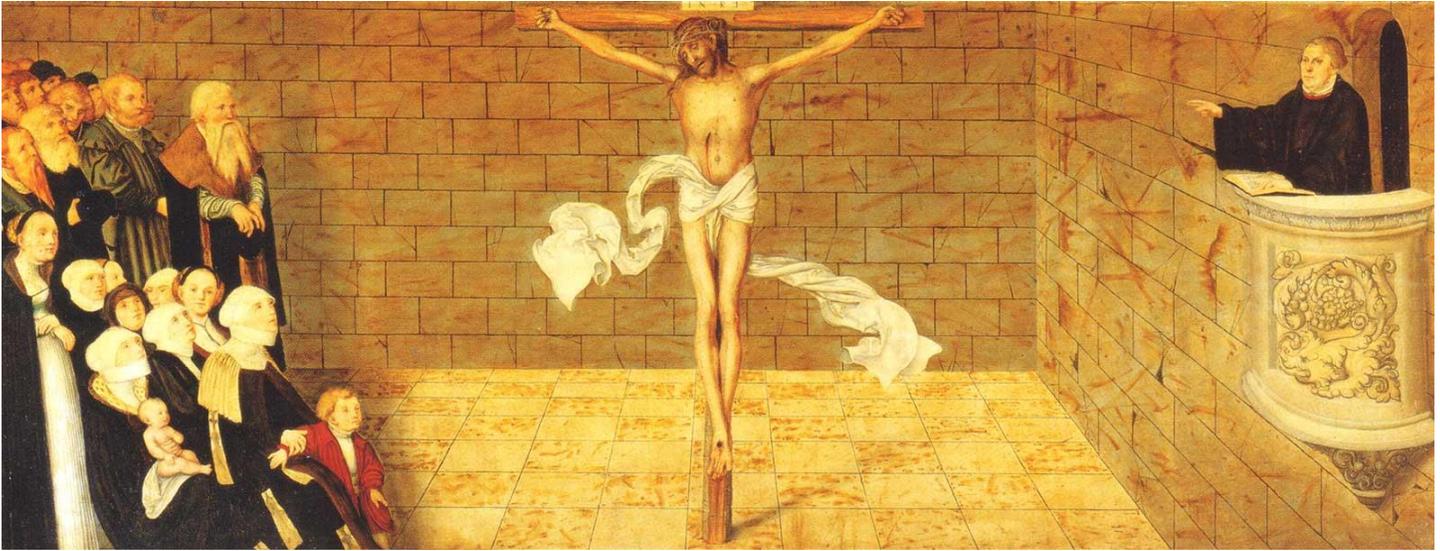


I put out on the table a small sampling of some of the things that are being written and published these days on Martin Luther. If we had a complete display we'd have tables all the way across and around and some of them would be overflowing with the publications that are appearing throughout the world and in the English language in a great number in these days before the continuation of the anniversaries of Martin Luther. We will have other anniversaries.

We've even had one discussion about a topic where we reached Martin Luther bilateral discussion—realization that it wasn't quite ripe.

Well, it was said, "Let's put that off for 2021, the fifth centenary of the Diet of Worms, and Luther's radical affirmation of his teaching before the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire."

That will be in April 2021, 500 years from Luther's refusal to recant.



I hope some of you have had the opportunity to see the PBS docudrama, that showed two and a half weeks ago on the Flint PBS. I was fortunate enough to be at Colombiere where we receive that station and it's quite a production of scenes from Luther's life acted out. The set of actors, and then breaks, in which those who have done scholarly work on Luther are interviewed, put in their perceptions and wider analyses of that event as we go, one by one, through about 25 scenes of Luther's life. There are some very fine aspects of that. There is one part that I am highly critical of in which they show Martin Luther three times, I believe, and perhaps four times in a pulpit preaching. And he is there in his Augustinian habit, with a niche, a round pulpit, but there's no bible open before him. That is a horrendous gap and absence in the historicity of depicting Martin Luther preaching. The most famous painting of his preaching by Cranach shows him in a little balcony, on the right side of the people, in Wittenberg city church, and has his left hand on the open scripture and his right hand is extended pointing to a very large life like crucifix with Jesus Christ having just died. And a group of people are depicted, as you see at the left side of that marvelous depiction of Luther's service and ministry: his theology of the cross; is imbibing of scripture, having his finger there, so that what comes out of his mouth might be the bible, and it's message and call.

I have to admit one of the reasons why, when I heard that this topic was going to be on your agenda, I readily volunteered. The reason is that so many popular accounts that circulate among Catholics do not do Luther justice. They reduce and downsize his importance to a particular short phrase.. "be a sinner then, and sin more bravely".

But of course the other part of that is *fortiter magis credere*, believe more bravely. Luther is one who condemned the peasants who condemned Jews and many people closed the book on Luther with these shorthand reduced sound bites. And Martin Luther is a colossal, an enormous historical figure. His breadth and length and width and height to paraphrase Ephesians is amazing, shocking when you get some perspective on what Luther brought about, what he wrote.

And the simple depth, in so many of his writings, interpreting the scripture, interpreting the mysteries of Christ, interpreting the mysteries of our lives. Luther wrote about human existence and the impact of God's working in human beings in a very powerful and striking way. Serious Christians should really appreciate the anguish that Luther can evoke by his prose over, "what is subpar in myself, what is wayward."

And then, on the other hand, we can turn to the good news with striking evocation of delight and profound relief over grace, forgiveness, the gospel announcement, the mediating work by which Christ's salvation is alive in the world. He has a little line in his commentary on Hebrews. He stood back from the text he was working on and wrote in a very quick way, "the ears alone are the organs of Christians;" and this has to do with one of these redemptive, salvific passages on Christ's work in the epistle to the Hebrews: "The ears alone are the organs of the Christian for stirring deep anguish, and raising one to the delight of salvation in Christ and through Christ." Luther's catechisms of 1529 are grand creations. I have one example here of a new edition of the large catechism that has just come out, a part of a spinoff from a six volume American edition of Luther's works, annotated. In that 1529 catechism he takes people through a particular part of the Apostles' Creed. The text is: "I believe in God Father almighty creator of heaven and earth. What is this? Answer: "God has created me together with all that exists.

God has given me and still preserves my body and soul, my eyes and ears all my limbs and senses, reason and all my memory. God protects me against all danger, and shields and preserves me from all evil, and all of this out of pure divine goodness and mercy" - a very typical normative word in Lutheran catechetical instruction.

Luther's greatness and grandeur also shows when he goes wrong. When he goes wrong it's huge, the breadth and the depth; for instance, in bondage of the will, an argument in practicing attack theology with Erasmus, the propagator of a humanistic moralism, Luther went to the extreme on necessitating grace and interventions by God *eraptus*, which seems there's coercion in that movement. But that's attack theology. And we can distinguish between the genres of which Luther wrote, and when anyone is doing attack theology we don't expect to learn too much because the author's main aim is to demolish an opponent; and, therefore, attack theology is not the best for learning the reality of Christ the Lord.

Luther made a claim early in his battle against condemnation from Rome, that the norm will be the self-interpreting scripture, *sacra scriptura sua ipsius interpretans*, scripture, the interpreter of itself. That opened western Christianity to the proliferation of Protestant Churches and movements as Luther, by that affirmation, stripped away the role of Fathers, the role of Councils. But, of course, when Luther brought out the Bible he didn't practice that. His bible, his New Testament of 1522, is very well annotated with very full introductions - the key books of the New Testament, by which you receive guidance on finding what that scripture presents and calls you to.

Part One

I'd like to start first with a little section on Luther's breakout in 1517, when he called for reforming the preaching of indulgences - the very event that is being commemorated in the coming days for its fifth centenary around the world. On the handout, the ivory pages, at the top of page one, there is a simple list of Luther's early works, some lecture courses that he gave. You see that he began by, shortly after he got his doctorate in 1512, by giving a three-semester course of lectures on the Psalter, dictating comments on every line and passage of the Psalms. Then, he took up in Easter 1515, for two semesters going into 1516, the Epistle to the Romans. And that was a momentous encounter in Luther's development. After that one, another year on Galatians, which then came out in published form in 1519 from the lectures that he had given. Number four is his first published book for the general populace, *The Seven Penitential Psalms*, translated into German. That's his first published translation, but with a running commentary of those psalms of repentance, and begging mercy, and admitting one's sin. That came out in just six months in Spring 1517, before the outbreak of the indulgence controversy. He had another lecture course in 1518 on the Letter to the Hebrews, to which I referred. And then, in 1518, a very important disputation, not on the power of indulgences, but on the power of the keys given by Christ; so that what is loosed on earth is loosed in Heaven from sin. And then, followed instructions under the aegis of God communicating and liberating, a forgiving word of confession with absolution, Baptism and Holy Communion. I'll have a section on them a bit later.

The Biblical lectures that Luther first started with— Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, and Hebrews —they combined tradition. He regularly cites Augustine; he cites Bernard of Clairvaux, and with considerable innovation as well.

At times, he even anticipates what will be his mature evangelical spirituality of experiencing part of the salvation. The Psalms, he took his prophetic of Christ's experience and prayer. They're written for Christ.

David is, yes, as a psalmist prophetic, and what is paradigmatic in Christ, shows itself then in the Church, as in the head, so in the body. And different verses of the Psalms fit into different eras of church history. And in that earliest lecture on the Psalms, Luther began his professorial career. And then, even in a third reading of a particular text, the members of Christ, again being conformed to their head, pray and experience what the Psalms express. During his lecture of the Psalms, he slammed our theologians, Duns Scotus, William of Occam, and one of Occam's disciples, who's life overlapped in part with Luther's, Gabriel Biel of Tübingen, who was a disciple of Occam in the nominalist tradition. Luther slams this group of theologians for their wordiness, for their lack of awe, lack of reverence in speaking of God.

They teach, and distinguish, and affirm with a self assurance that is inflated when dealing with the mysteries of God's work in the world. True theology, Luther says on this occasion, cherishes silent attention to God instructing us interiorly.

On Romans, this critique of the scholastics, expanded to target particular teachings of the scholastic theologians, especially the teaching that, yes, even in fallen humanity, there is a potential for beginning one's conversion, by a moral act, by that power that is attributed to even, yes, even fallen human beings, *quod faciendo in se*, doing what one is able. Luther attacks that mercilessly, and marshals texts of Romans, of Galatians, forcefully against that. Because, what you are doing, is bringing God to turn to you, to give you grace. You are working upon God rather than being worked on from the beginning, from zero. And you're turning in aversion to God. It's something Luther develops in his lectures of the Romans. And another time, on Romans, when he was working on that long passage of Romans 1:18 to 3:20, which is a long diatribe on the sinful humanity for the annunciation of Christ's redemptive death in chapter 3:21-25. As Luther is talking about that long section, he realizes what the reader, or hearer, might be experiencing as the diatribe attacking and confusing sin.

And so, when one has an accusing conscience for not living up to the law of love, "Whence comes your answer? Answer only from Christ, and in Christ, turn to him and say, 'He is satisfied; he is righteous; he's my defense who died for me, making his righteousness mine, and taking over my sin as his own'."

Luther treated many topics on Psalms, Romans and Galatians, but the many comments fuse into a particular spirituality. A spirituality that has its center point in conversion, which starts by admitting I have sinned, which is under God's judgment to say the truth about myself. And from this a spiritually serious person as Luther, depicts in various passages, comes to fervent desires, prayers for God to work within oneself to eradicate, to heal, to cure maladies of disorder, and tensions, and affections, the endemic sinfulness that we have to admit by a spiritual influence of his healing grace, *gratia sonat*, a concept well known to St. Augustine. Read the Confessions Chapter 10; you will see healing grace. "Christ is my physician," is well known in the Christian tradition, and Luther made it known as central in the prayer, in the yearning of a true Christian, based on these early texts. This healing grace can turn and heal the intentionality away from egotism toward generosity. There here is a spiritual therapeutic being depicted - God's grace is a living, moving operative influence that affects the spiritual healing. This is the spirituality of the first of the 95 Theses. Thesis 1: "When our Lord and teacher, Jesus Christ said, 'Do penance,' he meant that the whole of the Christian life should be one of penitence". Thesis 1. It comes smoothly, neatly, out of these lectures from the early phases of Luther's career before 1517. The prayer of a Christian under this influence of this teaching is, again and again, "Create your heart in me Lord; renew in me a steadfast spirit," Psalm 51. Luther said in his early Roman's interpretation that this life is a life of therapy and cures from sins, drives not a life of regained spiritual health. The Church is the end in which Christ our Samaritan brings us for His healing; that the Church is a permanent infirmary. Even, you might want to say, a field hospital, some people have been talking about recently. It's a community of ill people being treated. Heaven is the place for those who have been cured, and become well ordered.

In the current preaching accentuated by indulgence preaching people are not learning to yearn and long and bank on, to have in one's personal core this transformative influence that Augustine knew, Bernard of Clairvaux knew very well. In fact, the Tetzel campaign is promoting a sense of security in one's relationship to God - "I'm okay, I'm all right." And so, Luther heard from the people of Wittenberg, who had gone to a place some ten miles away to hear Johann Tetzel preach the St. Peter's indulgence and they came back to Wittenberg - the Prince of Wittenberg did not allow the indulgences to be preached - and Luther met the penitents who had heard and even obtained what was called a confessional letter from Tetzel's preaching.



At this moment I would like to take a four-minute break in which you can read Luther's letter of October 31, 1517 to the Archbishop, who sponsored the St. Peter's indulgence, and then turn to the next page at the same time for excerpts and selections from the 95 Theses that Luther inserted in the letter in an enclosure, calling upon reform to be brought out.

Letter, to Albrecht von Brandenburg, Archbishop of Magdeburg & Mainz, Oct. 31, 1517:

Under your most distinguished name, papal indulgences are being offered all across the land for the construction of St. Peter. Now, I do not so much complain about the preachers, whom I have not heard, but I bewail the gross misunderstanding among the people which comes from these preachers... [1] The poor souls believe that when they have acquired indulgences, they are assured of their salvation.

[2] They are likewise convinced that souls escape from purgatory as soon as they have placed a contribution into the chest. [3] Further, they assume that the grace obtained through these indulgences is so completely effective that there is no sin of such magnitude that it cannot be forgiven — even if (as they say) someone should rape the Mother of God, where this possible. [4] Finally, they also believe that someone is freed from every penalty and guilt by these indulgences.

O great God! The souls committed to your care are thus directed to death. For all these souls you have the heaviest responsibility. Therefore, I can no longer be silent on this subject... How can they make the people feel secure and without fear [about salvation] by means of those false stories and promises of pardon?

In the *Instruction* for the indulgence agents which is published under Your Excellency's name, it is written ...

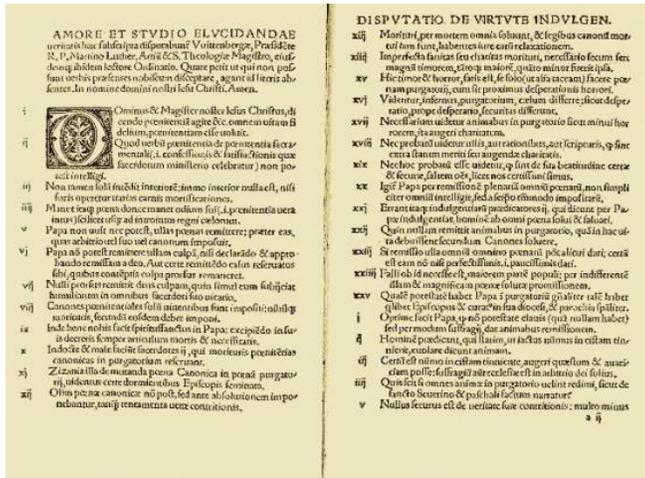
[5] that one of the principle graces [of the indulgences] is that inestimable gift of God by which a person is reconciled with God and [6] by which all the punishments of purgatory are blotted out. It also says there [7] that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who redeem souls or acquire a Confessional Letter.

From Wittenberg, 1517, Vigil of All Saints

[PS] If it is agreeable to Your Excellency, you could examine my disputation theses, to see how dubious is this belief concerning indulgences, which these preachers propagate as if it were the surest thing in the whole world.

Your unworthy son,
Martin Luther,—Augustinian, Doctor of Sacred Theology

So now reflecting on what we've read, we can see that Luther in addressing the Archbishop of Mainz/ Magdeburg had two main aims; and this letter, which is dated October 31, 1517, to which the theses were an enclosure. He first wanted to stir the Archbishops' sense of pastoral responsibility for overseeing the preaching, which needs a solid theological biblical basis, now lacking. Secondly, he wanted the Archbishop to withdraw the printed instruction that gave all the steps for entering into a city, beginning a series of sermons, presenting the indulgences, how to pass it out, agreed to a series of contributions that people would give according to their economic level of life. But the instructions, when they go out, include these grandiose claims for this indulgence. In its place Luther wants to see a new instruction that would promote a penitential way of life, according to Christ, as the Theses set forth, regarding conversion, forgiveness, penitential life, Christian living.



Of the 95 Theses on page two of the ivory colored handout.^{1/} Number 1, fundamental basic, and also a summation of what Luther had been delving out, that he had been deriving from his study of St. Paul and the Psalms: "When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said, 'Do penance,' he meant that the entire life of believers to be one of penitence, which strikes immediately, and directly, and very accurately, at the great claims of the indulgence preachers.

Numbers 21-23 are direct denials of what the people were saying as they came back to Wittenberg from hearing the adulterous preachers, and perhaps, making their offering, and receiving the indulgence, and even certificate, giving great faculties to a confessor to whom they would confess. Direct denials of what the peoples were taking away from the sermons.

Numbers 42-47 always begin with the same phrase: "Christians are to be taught that ..." Then Luther has a benign interpretation of Pope Leo X's intention behind this indulgence and what he really, attributing in a benign way, would desire. This is what right preaching and instruction would intimate or state, the thought that well certainly Pope Leo, as the head of Christianity, would want this taught.

Number 62 leaps off the page, "The true treasure of the Church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God, contrasted with the treasury of merits, of Christ and the saints, that are superfluous, because of their greatness and from which the Church can apply those to the situation of those who enter into the prayers, and make the contribution for the indulgence, the true treasure of the Church.

Numbers 82-89: a series of questions that reflectively would ask about this program of another indulgence with far greater claims, and about the Pope's power to bind and loose is being applied in this situation, and the financial side of it.

And then the final 4 theses - Luther's theology of the cross. To remember Cranach's great preaching, great picture, of his hand on the Scripture, pointing to the crucified Lord. And so, and thus, "Away with those prophets who say to Christ's people, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace. May all go well for those prophets who say to Christ's people, 'The cross, the cross,' although, there is no cross. Christians must be encouraged to diligently follow Christ, their head, through penalties, death and hell as he suffered and in this way, they may be confident of 'entering heaven through many tribulations,' rather than through the false security of peace." Luther's own motto, if he would have one for his whole theology, is *Theologia Crucis*, the theology of the cross.

Now, the archbishop did not answer Luther's letter. A couple of other bishops who also received the letter and the Theses did contact Luther. One of them said "Brother Martin, don't go any further. You're going to get into trouble with Rome." Another bishop said, "These 95 Theses are fantastic. I wish they could be put up on the front of every church in my diocese, but unfortunately, that has to be decided for the church province and diocese by the archbishop of Magdeburg, who was Albrecht of Brandenburg." So that other bishop had no success with his desire. The sending of the Theses then by the archbishop to Rome initiated the whole series of actions recently written about in a new encyclopedia of Martin Luther that Oxford University Press has brought out, 120 different short essays that cover the whole of Luther's career, treated the Catholic responses to Luther during the 16th century, and how in Rome critical measures were taken, then drawn back, then reapplied by a very zig zagging way before it came to the papal document of 1520 with 41 propositions of Luther that are censured in some way - not in a very precise weighing of the theological note.

But I would like now to turn to page three of my handout under the question - How did the Lutheran Reformation begin?^{2/} Now this I am doing some deconstruction of a very popular image of Luther himself with the hammer affixing the Theses to the door of the castle church. That's a legend, I believe.

Let's read his letter to Pope Leo X of May 1518, top of page three, along with a copy of his book in which he explained each one of the 95 Theses. He wrote to the Pope, "I burned with zeal for the honor of Christ, ... but I saw that I was not the proper one to decide or undertake anything in this matter. Therefore, I warned a number of prelates, of bishops. Some of them listened to me; others derided me; and others answered in different ways. At length, no other course was open to me but that of a moderate opposition to the indulgence preachers. So, I called their doctrines in doubt, and proposed a disputation on the question. I issued my Theses, and invited only learned colleagues to dispute them with me, which even my opponents can see in the preface at the top of the disputation Theses. The Theses were for disputing, not being doctrines nor dogmas, but just stated, as is customary in academic disputations, in obscure and enigmatic ways to stimulate discussion. If I had foreseen their spread, I would certainly have made them easier to understand."

This is a letter that goes to the Pope these number of months after the first distribution of the 95 Theses and that first letter to the archbishop. "I warned a number of prelates, Albrecht, and two or three others. At length, I called for a disputation of all the only learned colleagues who would help me clarify this work: unclear, undefined area of forgiveness of penance through indulgences. My Theses were not assertions of my doctrine, but stimuli to thinking and developing a solid account of sin, forgiveness and Christian growth. The spread of the Theses was, in a very minimal way, Luther's own work, by sending copies to a very select number of individuals. But through them, before 1517 ended, three printing houses got hold of them and saw here is a fantastic piece for publication. Two publishing houses, one in Leipzig, and another in Nuremberg turned out single placards in which the 95 Theses are written and in Basel the publishing house of Adam Petri turned out the first little book of 8 pages. So, from the folds from a large sheet from those in booklet form, in three German cities, and then, it spreads like wildfire through other reprinting, throughout Germany and Gastonia, low countries to France, Poland and Italy.

A second letter, somewhat after this letter, to Pope Leo, and the year after the first drafting of the 95 Theses—this is to Luther's own protector, Prince Frederick the Wise, the ruler of Electoral Saxony, who resided right in Wittenberg and whose castle was attached to the church with that much discussed do over. He wrote to the Prince, "Some have calumniously asserted that I undertook the disputation on indulgences at the suggestion and advice of your Grace. But, in fact, even my closest friends were not aware of it, but only Albrecht, Archbishop of Magdeburg, and Jerome, Bishop of Brandenburg. For I admonished in private letters those whose office it was to prevent the scandal, doing it most humbly and respectfully, before I published my disputation Theses. I knew quite well that I should not bring this matter before civil authorities, but first before the bishops. My letter is still extant; it has passed through many hands and bears witness to what I say."

So again, the emphasis on private contact, a letter of protest and admonition, through the archbishop and through other bishops without reference to holding a disputation. Of course, no disputation took place. And I add after that, that Luther gave the same account in his *Table Talk* after 1530, when there were students living in the big house that Luther then occupied with his family; and what he said at table be jotted down by different students, people with a secretarial talent; and those were published. And on three occasions he gives basically this account.

And then in two publications, 1541 and 1545, he repeats it in this fashion before he died in February 1546. He never spoke or wrote of himself posting the 95 Theses on the door of the castle church on October 31, 1517. So, we have Luther's own description of the events surround the drafting of his letter, the mailing of it, the drafting of the 95 Theses; and in all of them written during Luther's lifetime, no reference to a public posting.

I propose on the bottom of page three: How Did the Legend Come to Be?^{3/} The first person that is important here is George Roerer who made a hand-written Latin note in a New Testament printed in 1540, so now we are what 23, 24 years after the event. And he wrote: "In 1517, on the vigil of All Saints, in Wittenberg, Doctor Martin Luther had propositions on indulgences put up at the entrances to the temples." Roerer, however, was not in Wittenberg in 1517. He studied in Leipzig 'til 1520. But, in 1537 he had been hired and appointed by the Saxon Prince to work with Luther to gather Luther's works into published collected volumes. The note in 1517 in Latin, of which Roerer wrote, uses the phrases taken right out of the statutes book of the University of Wittenberg, on how a professor would inaugurate a disputation in one of the courses he was giving about: "Have these indulgences put up at entrances of the temples of several churches, using the church door as a bulletin board." And then, after Luther died in February 1546, Philip Melancthon wrote in the preface of Volume 2 of his collected Latin works, finished a text he wrote, completed on June 1, 1546, wrote: "Luther, burning with zeal for true piety, issued indulgence Theses which are printed in Volume 1 of this series, he's writing the preface of volume 2, he, Luther, posted these Theses publicly at the castle church in Wittenberg on the vigil of All Saints' in 1517." In 1517 Melancthon was still in Tübingen finishing his studies before coming to Wittenberg in 1518.



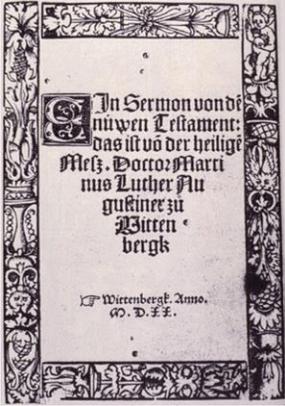
My interpretation is that these late attestations of a public posting of Luther's 95 Theses were part of an effort in Saxony to settle the church of Saxony, now Lutheran Reformed Church, on a solid basis to transform it from the initial protest movement into, a well-ordered church life, in which one could recognize solid foundations. Before these writings were made about posting the Theses, the Lutheran Church had adopted the Augsburg Confession, a systematic 21 articles of basic faith, and then further articles on reform. It had given official status to Luther's Catechisms for the teaching of the faith. It had conducted visitations of other parts of this realm, depicted in the PBS docudrama of Luther, after which Luther wrote his Catechisms, to remedy the miserable condition of Christian teaching in the churches spread across the land of Saxony.

This was a transformative period in which Lutherans were trying to establish themselves as an authentic recognizable Church of Christ that could be tolerated within the Holy Roman Empire of the German nations, which did come in 1555, when it was admitted, addressed confessional principalities, and duchies and free cities that adhere to the Lutheran Confessions could be full members of the Holy Roman Empire, along with the Catholic principalities, kingdoms, and cities. Regarding the hammer strokes: first of all the hammer would not have been used, because the statute said the dean had to okay the holding of a disputation, and he would have his beetle go to the different churches and post the Theses. And some of the earlier depictions of the so-called posting of the Theses shows a little man with a ladder putting them up, and Luther is standing on the side pointing to them. It's only in the 19th century that the hammer came into discussion. At this time, Saxon government was trying to monumentalize the beginnings of the reformation; and, in this case, to show how it came out of university theology being practiced in the normal ordinary way of holding disputations.

At the end, when somebody asked me, "Did it happen or did it not"? I'd have to say, "We look at a dial and the arrow goes back and forth, since this is a single particular event, from very, very likely well tested. Although doubts have been raised, and then some factors have come out that make it improbable, and then you come all the way over to where it is now, I would say unlikely, very probably did not happen." The result of which is to underscore the responsibility of those bishops who were sponsoring the St. Peter's indulgence in their territory, and not overseeing the claims that were being made, and, in fact, approving booklets in which those claims have some basis in a theological construction that was made for their propagation of the 95 Theses.

Luther appears as someone who Catholics can recognize as a very genuine and correct reformer of the Church, who took the proper steps in the hierarchical structure of the Church, which was the way indulgences were being distributed. Luther, the reformer, I think, takes on new brilliance, if we do put away the legend of the public posting, which did not lead to any disputation. And if a professor asked him in the University during this time to hold a disputation, there was nothing to stop him from carrying it through once the dean approved the public posting.

Part Two



I'd like to move now to a short, second part of my talk of Luther's popular instructions on page four of the ivory pages, introducing you to Luther's popular instructions that began to explode over all of Germany in 1519.^{4/} This is a side of Luther that's given very little attention in general histories, which was too often focused on the political side, and hardly ever treated in Catholic accounts of Luther. His outbreak of publishing on pastoral topics, just after the 95 Theses. These are publications about Christian living. In 1519 Luther began to realize the potency of the printing press to spread instructions for pastors and for the literate laity. In 1519 we have these eight short pamphlet size booklets, some just 8 or 16 pages. The first a Lenten account of how to meditate on Jesus' passion as redemptive for me. Second, an instruction on how to pray the Our Father and that migrated into Luther's large catechism of 1529, already having been developed a few years before. Third, an instruction on rogation days, the three days before Ascension Thursday, in which there would be processions through the fields after planting, praying for good weather. And Luther takes up the issue of how to praise in such a context. Number four is a book of biblical consolations for the Saxon Prince when he was sick.

Number five, pointers on preparing for death. A very popular genre of the late middle ages after printing was the *Ars Moriendi*, how to prepare for a good death. But these first five works, much instruction on focusing one's view on Christ crucified for me, bearing my sins, with a consoling encouragement for God's merciful forgiveness. And then, in late 1519 came the three sacrament sermons, and the word *sermon* here really means treatise. They were probably never given simply as such; if they were, they would have been called predict, not ceremony: sermon on the sacrament of Penance, Absolution, of Baptism and Holy Communion.

Let's stop for a moment on each of these. A pastor should motivate their peoples certainly to have sorrow and contrition for their sins as they receive the sacrament of forgiveness. But the crucial thing is that they turn from themselves to the word that is addressed to them, the ministers word of absolution. Luther wrote in 1518 regarding that word *credere fortiter*, believe firmly. This word deserves full credence. Absolution brings forgiveness, makes the conscience glad and joyful in being reconciled with God. Fix your trust upon it. The declaration of forgiveness, based on the keys given to the Church, and that solemn word of the Lord, "Whatever you loose on earth, this will be loosed in heaven." In the second booklet of 1519, in the series of the sacraments, Baptism undergirds a certainty of God's favor from the very beginning, infant baptism; because in that, God makes a covenant for your lifetime. It begins to make you a new person. He pours into you his grace and Holy Spirit, who begins to slay nature, and sin, and prepare you for, yes, final death and resurrection. Regarding Baptism and daily life, the Christian has to reflect in full trust on that intent and purpose of God, in his mercy expressed in the Trinitarian consecration of Baptism, the covenant of God for one's personal life. In preparing to receive Holy Communion, the people should sense what is here at communion, namely, Jesus inviting, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden; I will give you rest." Believe the promise as you receive Communion, the promise of rest for comfort, those who are in anxiety and sorrow. To receive the sacrament truly is nothing else than to desire that we firmly believe that Christ is initiating and carrying it out your own case. Whenever you go to the sacrament, do not doubt that you have what the sacrament signifies, that Christ and his saints are coming to you, to live, and work, and suffer, and die with you. Then your heart will become truly free and confident, strong and courageous, against all enemies.

This is a very important part of what Luther put into wide circulation in late 1519. The exercise of faith is a salient aspect of receiving absolution, Baptism and Holy Communion. He highlights the action of Christ received in faith receptively, a work of God's inner influence, to be sure, but faith in each of the situations is focused upon and grabs hold of an objective and utterly reliable word of God to me personally. The word of God is forgiveness, his covenant fidelity for a lifetime, of communion with Christ. This is Luther's characteristic personalizing of faith, that the redemptive mystery of reconciliation is for all men, and for me. And it's only rightly understood however, this faith, when it is correlated with that objective word addressed to the person receiving the sacrament. So, Luther after the 95 Theses, turned very much to instruction on the sacraments; and what he instructed is a very useful corrective to what many Catholics commonly do in reducing Luther's message to faith, and faith itself - trust in myself, faith alone. You know, it may be, causality is just as receptive as faith alone, not by merit and works, but the causal influence is that word, in virtue of the mandate of Christ our Lord to his disciples to go baptize, give absolution, in those cases the sacrament - celebrate the memorial of his death in the Lord's Supper. Catholics frequently detach, or sever, Luther's notion of faith as justifying from the mediations that are mandated by Our Lord, in which faith that lays hold of forgiveness expressed in a particular application to mean, lays hold of courage again, enemies and assurance of a supplied destiny and final union with God.

Part Three

I'm going to compress the third part of my talk about Luther's catechesis on the Church.⁹⁷ In the mid 1980s I joined the Lutheran Catholic International Dialogue the topic: The Church and Justification. And we turned out this agreed statement of our respective teachings with great areas of agreement as we worked it out. Luther's catechesis underlies Lutheran Catholic agreements on the nature of the Church and the work of the Holy Spirit and the sacraments. I give you on page four, the lower half of the page, an excerpt from Luther's catechesis as early as 1520. He not only published on the Our Father, he also published on the Creed in 1520. And then elaborated that further in the great formal catechisms of 1529. Luther follows the tradition that the Apostle's Creed has three main articles of the Father in creation, the Son in redemption and the Holy Spirit with the spirit's works: the Church, forgiveness of sin, resurrection of the body, life everlasting. And so, each simple affirmation of the creed unrolls itself into several points. And in the 1520 catechesis these are some paragraphs on the third article... I believe in the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? We can read together...



“I believe not only what this means— that the Holy Spirit is truly God, together with the Father and the Spirit Son, but also only through the Holy Spirit's work, can one come to the Father through Christ. Working through the Spirit, The Father and Son stir, awaken, call, and beget new life in me, and in all who are his. Thus, the Spirit, in and through Christ, quickens, sanctifies, and awakens the spirit in us, and brings us to the Father, by whom the Spirit is active and life-giving everywhere. I believe that throughout the whole world there is only one body, one holy, universal, Christian church, which is nothing other than the gathering or congregation of saints - of pious believers on earth. This church is gathered, preserved, and governed by the same Holy Spirit and is given daily increase by means of the sacraments and the word of God...

And I believe in this community or Christendom all things are held in common: what each possesses belongs also to others. No one has complete ownership of anything. Hence, all the prayers and good deeds of all the Christian community benefit, aid and strengthen me, and every believer, at all times, both in life and in death, and that each one bears the other's burden, as St. Paul teaches in Galatians.”

This is a little sample of ecclesiology according to Martin Luther. And by taking seriously passages, such as we have reviewed today, we have been able to uncover a very large area of common conviction and common profession of faith. And in 2015 we were able to complete a Declaration based on all the dialogues that have taken place since 1967 between Lutherans and Catholics in the United States, in Germany on the world level. And this is a remarkable platform of common agreements on church, on ministry of the Eucharist, which have their fundamental basis in Luther's catechesis, but then formulated in the Augsburg Confession, and then, with a common returning in bilateral dialogues of the scripture. And so, our foundation for doctoral dialogue is very firm, very strong. And we hope that through an honest and accurate reading of Martin Luther, and his intentions, and his prowess as an interpreter of Christianity, and as that even ecumenical dialogues can make progress toward that greater union that we all long for. Thanks very much for your attention. (Applause)

Transcribed by

Ben Parker

20171013

1/ *Ninety-Five Theses – Disputation for Clarifying the Power of Indulgences* [selections]

Out of love and zeal for bringing the truth to life, what is written below will be debated at Wittenberg, with Fr. Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Theology, ... presiding. Therefore, he asks that those who cannot be present to discuss orally with us will do so by letter.

1. When our Lord and Teacher (magister) Jesus Christ, said, “Do penance!” (*poenitentiam agite*, Mt. 4:17 Vulgate), he meant that the entire life of believers is to be one of penance.
21. The indulgence preachers err who say that through the pope's indulgence a person is released from every penalty. [vs. no. 4, in letter to Albrecht.]
27. They preach human opinions who say that as soon as a coin dropped into the chest clinks, a soul is released from purgatory. [vs. no. 2, above]

32. Those who believe that they can secure their salvation through indulgences will be eternally damned along with their teachers. [vs. no. 1.]
 33. One must especially be aware of those who say that the pope's indulgences are "God's inestimable gift" by which a person is reconciled with God. [vs. no. 5.]
 42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend the acquiring of indulgences to be compared in any way with the works of mercy.
 43. Christians are to be taught that a person who gives to a poor person or lends to the needy does a better deed than one who acquire indulgences.
 44. ...because love grows through works of love and a person is made better, but through indulgences no one is made better, but only from satisfactory penalties.
 47. Christians are to be taught that the pope, while granting indulgences, needs and deserves their devout prayer for him more that their money.
 62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.
 76. Papal indulgences cannot take away even the very least venial sin, regarding guilt. [vs. no.3]
- [Theses 82-89 give 'sharp questions of the laity' about the pope's power to bind and loose, the financial side of the St. Peter's indulgence, etc., about which good answers should be given.]
91. If indulgences were preached according to the spirit and intention of the pope, all these objections would be easily resolved – indeed they would not exist.
 92. And thus, away with all those prophets who say to Christ's people, "Peace, peace!" and there is no peace.
 93. May all go well for all those prophets who say to Christ's people, "The cross, the cross!" although there is no cross.
 94. Christians must be encouraged to diligently follow Christ, their head, through penalties, death and hell,
 95. ... and in this way they may be confident of "entering heaven through many tribulations" (Acts 14:22) rather than through the false security of peace.

Fr. Jared Wicks, SJ
Presented at an Elephants in the Living Room Educational Forum
at St. Blasé, Sterling Heights, MI on September 19, 2017

2/ How Did the Lutheran Reformation Begin?

Luther, letter to Pope Leo X, May 1518, with copy of ML's book, Explanation of the 96 Theses:

I burned with zeal for the honor of Christ, ... but I saw that I was not the proper one to decide or undertake anything in this manner. Therefore, I warned a number of prelates. Some of them listened to me, others derided me, and others answered in different ways. At length, no other course was open to me but that of a moderate opposition to the indulgence preachers. So I called their doctrines in doubt and proposes a disputation on the question. I issued my theses and invited only learned colleagues to dispute them with me, which even my opponents can see in the preface of the disputation theses.

The theses were for disputing, not being doctrines nor dogmas, but stated, as is customary, in obscure and enigmatic ways. If I had seen their spread, I would certainly have made them easier to understand.

Luther, letter of November 21, 1518, to Prince Frederick the Wise, ruler of Electoral Saxony, who resided in Wittenberg:

Some have calumniously asserted that I undertook the disputation on indulgences at the suggestion and advice of your Grace. But in fact not even my closest friends were aware of it, but only Albrecht, Archbishop of Magdeburg, and Jerome, Bishop of Brandenburg. For I admonished in private letters (*monui privatim*) those whose office it was to prevent scandal, most humbly and respectfully, before I published my disputation theses. I knew quite well that I should not bring this matter before civil authorities, but first before the bishops. My letter is still extant; it has passed through many hands and bears witness to what I say.

Luther gave the same account in his *Table Talk* on three occasions: in *Against Hanswurst* (1541), and in his autobiographical preface of 1545, before he died in Feb. 1546. **He never spoke or wrote of posting the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church on Oct. 31, 1517.**

Fr. Jared Wicks, SJ
Presented at an Elephants in the Living Room Educational Forum
at St. Blasé, Sterling Heights, MI on September 19, 2017

3/ The Legend of Luther's Public posting of His Theses

Georg Roerer, hand written Latin note, in New Testament printed in 1540:

"In 1517, on the vigil of All Saints, in Wittenberg, Doctor Martin Luther had propositions on indulgences put up on the entrances to the temples."

NOTE: Roerer studied in Leipzig 1511-50-1520. In 1537, the Saxon Prince appointed him to work with Luther, to gather the Reformer's writings into a 16-volume edition. This note on 1517 uses the Latin phrasing of the *Wittenberg University Statutes* about announcing the disputations.

Philip Melancthon, Preface, Vol. 2 of Luther's works, June 1, 1546 (after ML died 2/18/1546):

"Luther, burning with zeal for true piety, issued indulgence theses which are printed in Vol.1 of this series. He posted (affixed) these theses publicly at the Castle Church in Wittenberg on the vigil of All Saints' Day in 1517."

NOTE: In 1517 Melancthon was still in Tubingen, before moving to Wittenberg in mid-1518.

Fr. Jared Wicks, SJ

Presented at an Elephants in the Living Room Educational Forum
at St. Blasé, Sterling Heights, MI on September 19, 2017

4/ Luther's Popular Instructions of the year 1519

Meditation on Christ's Passion, March, for Lent; 24 printings in 8 cities by 1525 (Luther's Works, vol. 42, pp. 7-14)

A German Explanation of the Lord's Prayer for Ordinary Lay-Folk, April 13; 13 printings by 1522 (LW, 42, 19-18)

On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession, April; 24 printings in 8 cities by 1524 (LW 42, 87-93)

Fourteen Consolations for Those Who Labor and Are Heavy-Laden, August, printed February 1520 (LW 42, 121-166)

A Sermon on Preparing to Die, October; with 14 printings by mid-1521 (LW 35, 29-43)

The Sacrament of Penance, mid-October, with 14 printings by mid-1521 (LW35, 9-22)

The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism, November, with 16 early printings (LW 35, 29-43)

The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ, December, 14 printings by 1525 (LW 35, 49-67)

Fr. Jared Wicks, SJ

Presented at an Elephants in the Living Room Educational Forum
at St. Blasé, Sterling Heights, MI on September 19, 2017

5/ Luther's Catechesis on the Holy Spirit and the Church (1520)

[NOTE -Luther follows the tradition that the Apostles' Creed has three main articles, namely, on the Father and creation, on the Son and redemption, and the Holy Spirit, with the church, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. In Luther's catechesis, each article unfolds into further affirmations of belief, for example, into seven points of belief entailed in the third article, on the Holy Spirit, like the following:]

I believe not only what this means – that the Holy Spirit is truly God together with the Father and the Son, but also that only through the Holy Spirit's work can one become to the Father through Christ.... Working through the Spirit, Father and Son stir, awaken, call, and beget new life in me and in all who are his. Thus the Spirit, in and through Christ, quickens, sanctifies, and awakens the spirit in us and brings us to the Father, by whom the Spirit is active and life-giving everywhere.

I believe that throughout the whole wide world there is only one, holy, universal, Christian church, which is nothing other than the gathering or congregation of saints – of pious believers on earth. The church is gathered, preserved, and governed by the same Holy Spirit and is given daily increase by means of the sacraments and the word of God... I believe that in his community or Christendom all things are held in common: what each possesses belongs also to others and no one has complete ownership of anything. Hence, all the prayers and good deeds of all the Christian community benefit, aid, and strengthen me and every believer at all times, both in life and in death, and that each one bears the other's burden, as St. Paul teaches (Gal. 6:2). (Luther's Works, vol. 43, p.28)

Fr. Jared Wicks, SJ

Presented at an Elephants in the Living Room Educational Forum
at St. Blasé, Sterling Heights, MI on September 19, 2017