

# **Martin Luther & the Reformation**

**graduate MTP London**  
**December 2001**

Teaching Day/Graduate MTP note:

This material may be taught in four parts

1. Luther the Man (pages 2-5)
2. Luther the Mover (pages 6-8, parts of 13-16)
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4. Luther the Minister (pages 16-18)

**31<sup>st</sup> October 1517**  
**The North Door of the Castle Church,**  
**Wittenberg**

## Martin Luther and the Reformation

*“Martin Luther was a rather plump German monk. One day he was climbing the stairs in the monastery on his knees when he suddenly realised that there was no need to be doing this as he was saved by his faith, not by doing such acts. Thereupon he wrote down all the things he could think of wrong with the Catholic church and hammered the list to the church door. Then he was summoned to appear at the Diet of Worms (what a funny name!) The Catholic church tried to kill him, but he was fortunately hidden away by the local German prince and he died in his bed.”*

My knowledge of Martin Luther was not just rudimentary until last month – it was also wrong on almost every point! On Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2001 Douglas Jacoby took delegates at the annual Teacher’s Seminar to visit Wittenberg, the town with which Luther is most associated. We even had a devotional meeting in the chapel in which he held his lectures and expounded the Bible. After this experience and reading more about his life I have found myself in turn inspired by and indignant at his life, his courage and his errors. There is much here that is worth considering for anyone who loves God and the Scriptures and is concerned about the future of the International Churches of Christ. Every movement struggles with the development of tradition, handling and voicing dissent and the eternal battle between unity and truth. Among the reformers were champions of both types who ended up in sad disagreement. No matter what type the reader recognises himself to be (the hard-nosed champion of truth or the gentle champion of change by consensus), every disciple by virtue of being a disciple is a reformer to a degree and can benefit from studying Martin Luther and the Reformation.

### His life

“My father once whipped me so severely that I fled from him, and it was hard for him to win me back... My mother once beat me until the blood flowed, for having stolen a miserable nut.”

Martin Luther was born Bartholomew Rennebrecher Luther on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1483 in Saxony (modern Germany), to a peasant family. In fact, his father Hans had left the peasant life to work in mining by which he was able to advance himself and even become Mayor of a town later in life. He sent Luther to monks for his education at the age of 13, and by the age of 22 Luther had a Masters degree. His father then tried to push him into the Law, but after a couple of months, Luther suddenly decided to go into the Church. He conducted his first Mass as a Catholic priest in 1507 at the age of 24.

He was a child of his time. The authority of the Catholic church was a fact of life, the Bible and theology the preserve of the clergy and superstition played as big a part as the church in the life of the peasant. Thunderstorms, ailments, wars – all were seen as indications of God’s wrath. This superstition was to play into the hands of unscrupulous men who were later to profit from the sale of indulgences – on which more later.

Luther is generally pictured looking (for want of a better word) fat. However he was far from fat in early life. He took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience on entering the Augustinian monastery, and was very hard on himself. Growing up he had seen a prince dressed in a monk’s cowl begging for his food as an act of asceticism, and it had make a

big impression on him. This is what true spirituality consisted of, being “emaciated as Christ’s athlete.” He was serious and melancholic on occasion, but a brilliant thinker and writer. He rose through a Doctorate to become the Principal of the University of Wittenberg, a position which was to save his life. The Pope once demanded that Frederick the Elector of Saxony deliver up Martin Luther, and the Elector protested: Where else he was to find a principal for his University?

In around 1509 came the insight on which he was to base his whole theology and his future – that salvation came through faith alone. The verse which meant most to him at that time was Romans 1:17, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, “The righteous will live by faith.”” The error into which he had fallen will be seen clearly later – but for now this passage freed him from the dreadful anxiety which filled his life until that point. Even in his letters a new confidence could be noticed by his friends as he found the peace that had eluded him till then.

By 1517 he was well established in the University and a loyal son of the Church. He supported and encouraged free debate on matters of theology, and enjoyed the cut and thrust of intellectual discussion. He saw nothing in this to threaten the Church or Christianity, believing as he did in the truth of the Bible and the general good intent of the church. All this was to change. The sellers of indulgences nearby infuriated Luther and many other German churchmen who believed the church was falling into disrepute through these practices. Certainly these sellers focused more on people buying forgiveness from the church than on their need for personal repentance. Luther sought to debate the issue and on Halloween (Oct 31<sup>st</sup>) 1517 nailed up 95 heads for debate on the North door of the Wittenberg church. These are known as the “95 Theses”, or propositions”, but had not been thoroughly supported by argument – that was supposed to follow. Luther was unprepared for what happened next. The list was printed and widely circulated (without his permission). It became the focus of a revolution which was to change the Western world, and possibly the whole world, for ever.

Gentle attempts were made to make Luther retract some of these Theses. He in turn wrote to the Pope, fully believing to get his support. At worst, he would get a forum to debate these ideas and get the practice of selling indulgences removed from Saxony.

Another academic, most likely to advance his own reputation, offered to debate Luther at Leipzig, and John Eck was seen to triumph in asserting the authority of the church over questions of personal conscience. Shakespeare would later write, “There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.” The church asserted, “There is nothing either right or wrong but what the church tells you is so.” Luther’s books were burned by the Pope’s representatives to Germany.

By 1520 Luther had been excommunicated for failing to stop speaking against the selling of Indulgences. So widespread was his support in Germany that the proclamation of his excommunication was greeted by nine tenths of Germans shouting “Long live Luther” and the remaining tenth shouting “Death to Rome.”

In 1521 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V of Spain summoned him to appear before him at a conference which went by the unfortunate name of the “Diet of Worms.” (Worms being a city and a diet being a meeting. It was to discuss matters of concern to Europe at the time, wars with Turkey and the like, and was essentially a political and economic affair.) What to do with Luther was a consideration, and he was summoned to

appear before the Diet. It was there that he made his most famous speech and rose arguably to his finest hour.

After the Diet, Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, protected and hid Luther from the Catholics. Some even believed him dead. Outside Luther's walls, however, the fires were blazing. Monks and nuns left monasteries. Other groups like the Anabaptists found new voice. Wittenberg was descending into chaos, and Frederick asked Luther to return to restore order. In a depressed moment Luther wrote to his Protector, "To my sorrow the movement has made a mockery of all the good that has been done and has brought it to nought."

Within months there was a significant revolt by the peasants in Germany which threatened to bring Luther into disrepute and uproot the fragile soil in which this new plant was growing. In the years that followed, Luther crossed swords with other reformers, notably Erasmus and Zwingli. Remarkably, he considered both of them to be enemies of the gospel and when they died he cast doubt on their salvation. Before he died two attempts were made to unite the Protestant groups with each other and with the Catholic church. The statements agreed at these meetings were called the Augsburg and Wittenberg confessions. Like the famous "Good Friday" agreement in Northern Ireland, the agreement was more words than minds. Each side so interpreted the words as to satisfy their parties that they had made no concessions.

For the remainder of his life he was nowhere more at home than in his work as a scholar. He devoted himself to producing the German Bible, probably his greatest contribution to the world. He was a copious writer of some 420 works which would amount to some 100 good sized volumes in a modern library. Indeed, he was never happier than when teaching from the Bible. He reformed the teaching at Wittenberg so as to make the Bible and the early Church Fathers the staple diet of the students, and not Aristotle. Some of his classes were even taught in the little chapel in which our Teachers' Seminar met. His lectures were of a very high standard, his insights valuable and his personal sincerity unquestionable. On what constituted good preaching he wrote, "A preacher should bare his breast and give the simple folk milk."

I have mentioned how he was characterized by greater peace after realising no works could save him. His security grew to such a degree that he was even accused (like Jesus) of being a glutton and drunkard. He wrote of the students that he mixed with, "What harm does a little jollity do? The beer is good, the maid fair, the boys young." It is hard to believe this to be the same man as the grim ascetic of early years. Yet he was scrupulous in his sexual standards. He was shocked by the low neck-lines of dresses in Wittenberg in his later years. "The women and girls have begun to go bare before and behind... Away with this Sodom," he wrote.

The humour contained in his letters surprised me and warmed me to the man.

As a monk he was single for many years. "Before I was married," he wrote, "the bed was not made up for a whole year and became foul with sweat. But I worked all the day and was so tired at night that I fell into bed without knowing that anything was amiss." Shocking!

In the liberated years following the Diet of Worms many monks and nuns left their vows of chastity and married. Luther himself married an ex-nun Catharine von Bora – in fact, the only one he was unsuccessful in marrying off to someone else. They had several

children, and she seems to have been an impressive woman by all accounts. Rumour has it he offered her a large sum to read the Bible all the way through. Later he wrote that “Katie understands the Bible better than many papists did 20 years ago.” Here is a sample of some humorous table talk between the two.

- ML We shall yet see the day when a man will take several wives.  
 K The devil thinks so.  
 ML The reason, dear Katie, is that a woman can only have one child a year, whereas a man can beget several.  
 K Paul says, “Let each man have his own wife.”  
 ML Aye, his own wife, but not only one; that is not in Paul.  
 K Before I would stand that I would go back to the convent and leave you and your children.  
 {He then jabs her playfully.}  
 K Ave Maria!  
 ML Why don’t you finish your prayer? Would it not be a comfort to say Jesus Christ too?

He was also congenial in his relations with his Protector Frederick. In 1522, Wittenberg was becoming a hotbed of sects and Luther returned from exile to his undisputed position of authority in the town to restore order. It was a mixed blessing for Frederick to have Luther a public figure once again. Teasing him for his love of relics, Luther wrote to him, “Grace and joy from the God the Father on the acquisition of a new relic!... Without cost or effort, God is now sending your Grace an entire cross, complete with nails, spears and scourges... Be glad and thankful!” Luther was referring to himself as the cross Frederick had to bear.

In summary, here are some key dates for his life:

1483	Born	1517	31 <sup>st</sup> October, Wittenberg & 95 Theses
1496	Age 13, enters monastery	1521	Diet of Worms
1509	First Mass as a priest	1525	Married, age 42
1510	Age 27, Romans 1:17	1546	Died, age 63

So what of my early assumptions?

The “*rather plump German monk*”? Only latterly. Early on he was far from indulgent.

His “*conversion while climbing stairs on his knees*”? Actually, it was a gradual affair that took place in his study. The stairs themselves were in Rome, not in his monastery in Germany.

The “*95 grievances with the Catholic church*”? It was years after 1517 that he realised the Catholic church would not allow itself to be reformed. The list itself was only a proposal for a debate, and the church door was effectively the town notice-board.

“*The Diet of Worms*”? This was a political meeting. Luther had become a political issue.

“*Hidden by the German prince till he died*”? No, only for two years. After that, he emerged again as a public figure from the age of 40 till he died age 63.

## His 95 Theses

I have already mentioned my mistake in thinking that his Theses were against the Catholic church. They were in fact a challenge to a scholarly debate on the question of indulgences, never intended to question the authority of the Catholic church as a whole.

You can in fact go to the same church and see the famous doorway. The old door has long since gone, and the new door is of iron, cast with the text of the famous Theses.

Just a month before, Luther had published 97 Theses on another matter he wanted to debate. He was a man who spoiled for a fight! We need some of these kinds of men in the Kingdom.

Here is the background. Albert, a young but wealthy nobleman, sought from the church the positions of Archbishop of Mainz and Primate of Germany. As he was only 23, under the minimum age for such positions required by Canon Law, the Pope would not agree without a very large donation. He asked for 12,000 ducats, 1,000 for each apostle. Albert offered 7,000 (representing the Seven Deadly sins), and they ended up agreeing on the huge sum of 10,000 ducats.

To allow Albert's bankers to recoup this sum, the Pope authorized the preaching of a special indulgence in his territories. The church taught that they had the power to remit time in purgatory – of oneself and of others. (Purgatory is the place you pay for your sins before entering heaven. If you're not baptised, you don't even make it into purgatory – sorry.) This was what it meant for the church to be the “treasury of the merits of Christ” and for Peter to have the keys given to him to bind and loose on earth. Indulgences are actually understandable. The church would specify from time to time what would be considered good works e.g. a donation to HOPE worldwide, giving to India, x contacts. As part of your repentance, your priest (or discipler) would give you something to do. Surprisingly, Luther found nothing wrong with this. So what did he object to?

Like many Germans, he resented this “bloodsucking” by Albert and his bankers, Fuggers of Augsburg. They received 50% of the net receipts, and the other 50% was to go to rebuild St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The then Pope was Leo X. If this sounds business-like, it was.

Secondly, he objected to the lack of preaching of the need for real repentance. The payment was no longer a good work that accompanied a repentant heart – it had become the price of your forgiveness. This is what the local Indulgence-seller Tetzl was preaching. “Once the coin into the coffer clings, a soul from purgatory heavenward springs!”

It was manipulative. Tetzl used emotional blackmail to secure payment – completely ignoring the real purposes of indulgences. “Do you not hear the voices of your dead relatives, crying out to you, Pity us, Pity us!” In modern parlance, “Can you hear the cries?”

Fourthly, he objected to the superstition surrounding relics (i.e. Saints' bones, pieces of the cross etc). His Sovereign, Frederick the Elector of Saxony was into relics. During his life he had amassed 5005 relics, which he kept in the Castle Church in Wittenberg. This was worth 1443 years time off purgatory! On November 1<sup>st</sup> there was to be a public display of the relics. It was an appropriate occasion for a public debate on the matter, and

hence Luther nailed his 95 Theses, or heads of debate, to the door of the same church where the relics were kept the night before.

For a whole year, Luther consistently held out for a true debate on the disputed issue and insisted that the authority of the church was not in question. In fact, when he realised his action had sparked widespread interest he was quick to write to the Pope. He requested his support and that he act to protect the honour of the church which was at risk because of the habits of the preachers and sellers of indulgences. He expected Papal support.

Then, when pushed, he denied that the authority of Christ resided in the Pope. He admitted that he thought that the Pope and council could be wrong, as judged by the standards of the Scriptures. But he wrote that in fact the church of Rome “has never contradicted the true faith by any of its decrees.”

From admitting that Rome *could* be wrong, it was a short step to say that they *were* wrong. Having been to Rome on monastery business as a young priest (when the step-climbing incident occurred), he knew how much wealth was there and little reverence for the Bible. However, as a “good disciple” wishing to grow in humility, he quickly banished any critical thoughts from his mind, but the damage had been done. From Jesus clearing the temple to modern faith-healers, God has always opposed the enrichment of a priestly caste at the expense of the poor, and the corruption had not escaped his notice.

Was it a reformation or not? Ironically, Luther did not actually reform what he would have liked to have done. The Catholic church would not allow itself to be reformed. The Protestant Reformation might more accurately be called “The Formation of a Protest Group” than the Reformation of anything. When the Catholic church did make some changes in response to Luther’s challenges, they became known as the “Counter-Reformation” and in many cases were a hardening of their traditional positions.

There are many things we can learn from the church’s mistakes as it drove away a loyal son.

- (1) First, a series of mistakes had led to bizarre demands made on people.
- (2) Instead of listening, they became harsh. People need meat.
- (3) They turned a legitimate query into an authority issue. “Will you accept that we are always right anyway?”
- (4) Favouritism, privilege and corruption will find you out.
- (5) Servant leadership will keep the Luthers in the fold. A stiff hierarchy won’t.
- (6) Church and state must be separate.

## His courage

We can definitely learn from Luther's courage.

I have already mentioned the incident when Luther's books were burned. This was a red rag to a bull. Instead of turning the other cheek, he called the town together on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1520. They watched as he burned two things – the Papal Bull (the statement condemning him) and a copy of the Canon (= Church) Law. As he was burning them, he addressed Pope Leo X, the author of the Bull in these words: "Because thou has brought down the truth of God, he also brings thee down into this fire today. Amen."

There are few times his courage showed more than on his summons to appear before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles of Spain at the Diet of Worms. He wrote to a friend that he intended to go, since "He lives and reigns who saved the three Hebrew children in the furnace of the King of Babylon." He wrote to another about the Emperor's motive in summoning him: "If he summons me to recant, I won't go. [Since to go, refuse to recant and come home is so worthless I might as well have stayed at home.] If he summons me to die, I shall offer to go." It is had been me, I would probably have done the opposite. "If he summons me to die, there's no way I'm going. If he only wants me to recant, I do not have a problem with going even if it's just to tell him I won't!"

At the Diet the Pope would not even hear the rebel in his defence, as all the Pope's representatives absented themselves. By this time Luther was already excommunicated from the church. Before the Emperor the Reformer was presented with an assortment of his books and asked if he recognised them and if he would recant any of the contents. After a day's grace to consider his reply, Luther returned and gave a lengthy reply which was not satisfactory. So he was asked point blank, "Will you recant or not?" To which he replied,

"Since your Majesty and your Lordship ask for a plain answer, I will give you one without either horns or teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture or by right reason (for I trust neither in popes nor in councils, since they have often erred and contradicted themselves) – unless I am thus convinced I am bound by the texts of the Bible, my conscience is captive to the word of God, I neither can nor will recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen."

One historian Preserved (*sic.*) Smith goes on, "The Spaniards broke into groans and hisses, the Germans into applause... When he reached his lodgings, he joyfully exclaimed, "I am through, I am through." He had indeed done the great deed he had set out to do and spoken the words which will ring through the ages."

His courage contrasts with many who feared to stand by him. He wrote a very sensitive and respectful letter to his former Superior at the monastery, the same one who had groomed for the post of Principal of the University. The Superior had attempted in vain to reconcile Luther with the Pope. Luther was hurt but respectful in the letter he wrote to him, citing Luke 9:26. "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him...", he wrote, adding "You are too yielding, I am too stiff-necked."



## His errors

As with all great men, you sometimes want to hate them and sometimes love them. Luther was flawed in both life and doctrine. These are some of the ways.

1. Harsh support for the suppression of the German Peasants' War
2. Harsh labelling of his critics as heretics
3. Belief in a harsh form of predestination, later to be called Calvinism
4. Harsh handling of the Bible.

### 1. Harsh support for the suppression of the Peasants' War.

One error in his life was his incitement to bloody repression of a peasants' rebellion, and another his bloody-minded tendency to label his critics heretics. He could be as authoritarian and ruthless in his condemnation of others with the pen as the Catholic church had been through its decrees.

First, the Peasants' War in 1525 was awkward for Luther. It was led by one of his early followers called Muntzer. Their grievances were legitimate, but for Luther the means of redress they were taking were not acceptable. The success of his break with Rome was almost undermined by the rioting of the common people who had now been given an intoxicating taste of liberty. With his peasant background and sympathies, he would have appeared a likely ally and champion for the Revolt. However, Luther saw the danger of Germany plunging into anarchy, and the fledgling Protestant movement being sucked down with it. The region had to be politically stable to support this new life, as he saw it. When negotiations failed, he therefore chose to take sides firmly with the establishment and urge bloody repression.

In one letter he wrote, "My opinion is that it is better that all the peasants be killed than that the prince and magistrates perish." Did he know the irony of his statement? Caiaphas the High Priest made a similar remark about Jesus. "It would be better that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." In so saying he authorised the death of Jesus in the name of peace and thereby went down in history as the evil man under whose High Priesthood the Son of God was executed. For Luther his harsh support for the suppression of the rebellion in the name of expediency has always been held against him.

But why did Luther take the position he did? Although he was for Reformation, he was not for any kind of political insurrection. His revolt was one of ideas only. For him, political revolt was one of the worst sins, as it destroyed the very fabric of society. The 3 crimes Luther laid against them were

- (1) they had broken their oath of fealty (= service),
- (2) rioting and plundering, and
- (3) claiming they were acting in the name of God

He distanced himself from Muntzer. He admitted that had he chosen to he could have caused much more bloodshed, but he had chosen instead to do all by the preaching of the Word alone. He sought to change men's ideas and ways of thinking and bring about revolution that way.

His harshness appeared again in a letter. He wrote to the Princes at the height of the Revolt, “Wherefore stab, smite and slay all whom you can. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog: if you do not strike him, he will strike you and a whole land with you.”<sup>1</sup> When criticised for his harshness he responded in his usual way – by writing a reply and retracting nothing.<sup>2</sup>

It was a tragedy. Over 100,000 peasants were killed. Luther’s reputation was also a casualty, forever tarnished by his harshness.

## 2. Harsh labelling of his critics as heretics

The same tendency appears in his dealings with his fellow-reformers and contemporaries Erasmus and Zwingli. Initially it seemed they should have worked well together. All agreed the Catholic church was ripe for reformation. At one point the German Elector Frederick was unsure whether to support Luther or not. He wrote to Erasmus to enquire whether Luther had erred or not. Erasmus replied that Luther “has erred in two points, in attacking the crown of the Pope and the bellies of the monks.” They were on the same page.

In spite of this promising beginning, harshness reared its head over the issue of predestination with Erasmus and communion with Zwingli.

Erasmus wrote to him, “The whole world knows your nature... The same admirable ferocity... you now use against my book in spite of its courtesy. How do your scurrilous charges that I am an atheist, an Epicurean and a sceptic help the argument?”

When he died, Luther wrote of Erasmus that he died “without light, without the cross and without God.”

Zwingli wrote a treatise to Luther called “A Friendly Exegesis of Christ’s Words”, in which he said, “You have produced nothing on this subject worthy either of yourself or of the Christian religion, and yet your ferocity daily increases.”

Luther wrote about his relations with Zwingli in a letter to his wife that “we would not call them brothers or members of Christ, although we wish them well.”

Luther claimed to be tolerant of others on all points except those which concerned the preaching of the gospel. However in practice he made into matters of gospel all points of biblical interpretation on which others differed from him. For him therefore, neither the Catholic church, Erasmus nor Zwingli were preaching the gospel.

## 3. Belief in a harsh form of predestination

So what were his views on predestination? The starting point was Romans 1:17, that the righteousness of God is imputed to the believer. Righteousness is given to us – it is not a quality of God that we cultivate in ourselves. (This is a reaction against the harsh world of the Augustinian monk of the Middle Ages, for whom all life is a quest to acquire that

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<sup>1</sup> A treatise entitled “Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants”.

<sup>2</sup> “An Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants”

righteousness. The quest for perfect humility, for example, was a tortuous one.) If righteousness is a pure gift, then all is dependent on God's choosing whom to give it to. Here is an example of what he believed,

“The human will is like a beast of burden. If God mounts it, it wishes and goes as God wills. If Satan mounts it, it wishes and goes as Satan wills. Nor can it choose the rider it would prefer, nor betake itself to him, but it is the riders who contend for its possession. God foreknows nothing subject to contingencies, but he foresees, foreordains and accomplishes all things by an unchanging, eternal and efficacious will. By this thunderbolt free will sinks shattered in the dust.”

His most complete work on this is called “Unfree Will” (De servo arbitrio in Latin)

Why is this a “harsh form of predestination”? Quite simply because while predestination is unquestionably a biblical doctrine, Luther was wrong as to its form. In the Bible God's predestination takes two forms.

- (1) He had a master plan which involved the crucifixion of Jesus. He did not just foreknow it – he planned it because he loved us. It was not an accident. The plan involved the church spreading the message. (Acts 2:23, 1 Cor 2:8, Eph 2:10, 11). That the plan was always in God's mind is shown by the amazing prophecies and foreshadowings in the Old Testament about the plan centuries before it happened! In this sense, God works out everything in conformity with his will, i.e. his will on a grand scale (Ephesians 1:9-11)
- (2) He has set the standards for our entry in the kingdom and predetermined that as his sons we will be transformed into Jesus' likeness. In a way, he gave us new Jesus-DNA when he put his Spirit inside us. (Romans 8:29, 30)

Erasmus' critique is summarised in Appendix A below.

#### 4. Harsh handling of the Bible.

Lastly, Luther had some views on the Bible that contradicted each other. It is true that he loved the Bible for his whole life. One of his lesser known achievements was to rid the University of Wittenberg of Medieval Philosophy and replace it with taught courses in Bible. The Bible was his passion. Here are some facts about his translation of the German Bible.

- a. He started in 1521, had published the NT by 1522 and the OT and Apocrypha by 1532
- b. He used the Masoretic text for OT and Erasmus' Greek NT for the NT.
- c. The German word for “congregation” is used (more correctly) whenever the English use the word “church” (which does not mean anything very much in everyday speech). The Greek word “koinonia” has the idea of fellowship.<sup>3</sup>
- d. Luther added the word “alone” after the phrase “justify the circumcised by faith” in Romans 3:29-30, and was criticised for it.
- e. He insisted that the Bible was the inerrant word of God, but then discounted the bits he thought were in error!

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<sup>3</sup> Our churches in Germany and Austria all begin “Int. Gemeinde Christi”, Gemeinde being the German word for congregation or community. He does not use the German word “Kirche”, the equivalent of the English word Church or Scottish Kirk.

- f. In practice, only Luther's interpretation was accepted by him as correct. This led to the claim that papal inerrancy had been replaced by another form of inerrancy.<sup>4</sup>
- g. He denied Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch, declared Job an allegory, Jonah childish and James an epistle of straw.
- h. His best books were Psalms, John and Paul's letters – "for those who had to fight heretics." However, he accepted that for the common man the best books were the first three gospels.
- i. In his marginal notes to James 2:24 he wrote "That is false" and to James 2:12 "What chaos."

This is what he wrote about the apparent conflict between Paul's letters and the epistle of James. "If anyone can harmonise them I will give him my doctor's hood and let him call me a fool. Let us banish this epistle from the universe for it is worthless. It has no syllable about Christ, not even naming him except once at the beginning. I think it was written by some Jew who had heard of the Christians but not joined them."

The Lutheran maxim "sola Scriptura", as used by Luther, therefore raises more questions than it answers.

David Bercot sums up Luther as "a devout man of faith with enormous courage. Yet, he was also impulsive, hot-headed and egotistical... And in some instances, he actually held on to Roman doctrines and discarded truly catholic (apostolic) doctrines. In fact, rather than returning to the apostolic teachings of the early, pre-Constantinian church, Luther instead returned to the teachings of Augustine."<sup>5</sup>

Someone once said that those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. Nobody who loves God's kingdom can fail to shudder at the corrupt and oppressive organisation into which Christ's church evolved through a series of seemingly insignificant steps away from the truth.

Having considered Martin Luther and the Reformation and with an eye on what is in the appendices following, I think there are a number of areas which are fruitful to consider.

1. What is the place of the Bible in the church and in the hands of a reformer? Were both the church and Luther guilty of overusing certain Scriptures and missing the whole flow?
2. What is the balance between supportiveness and unity on the one hand, and blind obedience on the other?
3. What are the signs of a movement that is ripe for reformation? Do we see even the slightest tendency to any of these signs in the ICOC today?
4. Do we have to have a uniform, official position on every doctrine? What are the attractions of such certainty? What are the dangers?
5. If you had been alive in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, what would you have done? What kind of reformer would you have been?
6. Do you have any would-be Luthers in your congregation? Are you using them or suppressing them? Do you have any insights on how to help such people use their gifts for God as a result of studying out Luther's life?

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<sup>4</sup> As someone said, Before the Reformation, there was only one Pope. After the Reformation, every person with a Bible in his hand became a Pope."

<sup>5</sup> David Bercot, Will the Real Heretics please Stand Up?" Tyler, 1989, p. 134

## Appendix A Luther and the Reformers

<b>Name</b>	<b>From...</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Known for</b>
John Wycliffe (or Wyclif)	English	1329-1384	English Bible The Lollards	Morning Star of the Reformation Burnt posthumously
Jan Hus	Czech	1374-1415	Scripture the sole authority	Burnt at stake
Desiderius Erasmus	Dutch	1467-1536	Greek New Testament	Wit and scholarship
Martin Luther	German	1483-1546	German Bible, “The Reformation”	95 Theses, Hymns
Philip Melanchton	German	1497-1560	Lutheranism	Luther’s successor
Ulrich Zwingli	Swiss	1484-1531	Swiss reformation in Zurich	Dying in battle against Catholics
John Calvin	French	1509-64	Theology	TULIP Calvinism
John Wesley	English	1703-1791	Methodists, Hymns	Outdoors preaching

### Luther and Erasmus

Erasmus, a few years older than Luther, had a reputation as an enemy of superstition and a love of learning. Early in their relationship Luther referred to himself as “your little brother in Christ.” Erasmus was very witty and skilful in writing, and sometimes Luther interpreted his lack of bluntness as betraying an unwillingness to take a stand. In a way Luther was right. Erasmus’ life task was the peaceful reformation of the church. However, it is questionable whether one such as Erasmus was really of the right mould to bring that about. As Jesus said, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” and doubtless Luther’s anger and disappointment at Erasmus can be likened to feelings towards the citizen who refuses to take up arms against a common enemy.

In keeping with his character, Erasmus worked hard to get Luther a forum to debate his theological problems with the practice of indulgences. This led to Luther’s invitation to appear before the Imperial Diet. One wonders whether Erasmus was not rather naïve. Would Satan the roaring lion really lie down so easily and be pacified by skilled debate? Teachers in the kingdom may be tempted to think so, but the apostle Peter and the veteran Luther would beg to differ – see the text of Luther’s hymn in Appendix B.

Erasmus summarised his problems with Luther to Zwingli thus:

“Martin Luther’s chief errors are

1. Designation of all good works as mortal sin
2. denial of free will
3. justification by faith alone.

“Those please me who attribute something to free will but much to grace.”

This would probably be a good summary of the ICOC’s position. The clash between the two men can be attributed to their different backgrounds. While both Augustinian monks, what for Erasmus is an interesting discussion is for Luther a matter of life and death.

## Luther and Zwingli

Luther clashed with Zwingli and the Swiss Protestants over the matter of communion. It became known as the Sacramental Controversy.

For Catholics, in communion the bread and wine became the actual body and blood of Christ. This is called Transubstantiation. For Luther, this made no sense, as the body of Jesus is now resurrected and in heaven. However, the Scriptures “This is my body/blood” allow of no other meaning than that when we take the bread we are taking the body of Jesus between our teeth. This position is called Consubstantiation. Reformers like Zwingli and, it must be said, later Lutherans, merely took the bread and wine to be symbols. This is called the Memorial view. This had also been the view of John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, for which they were condemned by the Catholics.

The story of the debates and accusations between Luther and the Memorial group are as distasteful to the disciple of Christ as the controversies of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries over the nature of Christ’s divinity. Luther especially comes out badly, not so much for the quality of his arguments as for the manner in which he treats his opponents. One German Prince Philip of Hesse (who was later embarrassingly exposed for bigamy) was a champion of the Protestant cause and tried to get Zwingli and Luther to agree at a meeting in Marburg. Luther, however, refused to give Zwingli the right hand of fellowship. Writing to his wife, he says of Philip, “He did his best to make us united, hoping that even though we disagreed yet we should hold each other as brothers and members of Christ. He worked hard for it, but we would not call them brothers or members of Christ, although we wish them well.”

## Luther and Wycliffe

All these reformers shared a desire to put the source of spiritual knowledge in the hands of the ordinary man. This empowering is the seedbed of all revolution, social and spiritual, and is always opposed by those who benefit from the status quo.

Wycliffe translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into English. He appointed preachers known as Lollards who preached in English around England from their base in Lutterworth near Cambridge. Hus, influenced by Wycliffe, was known for his preaching in the Czech language. Luther translated the Bible into German for the German people, and saw his role in the reformation as staying in Wittenberg and training a group of preachers and teachers competent in handling and teaching the Scriptures to the common man. The survival of the Lutheran movement shows the effectiveness of this approach.

## Luther and Hus

Martin Luther was labelled a Hussite by John Eck at a famous debate in Leipzig. The debate was supposed to be about indulgences, but Eck managed to turn the tables and make it a debate about the authority of the Pope. It is true that this was an area where Luther found himself agreeing increasingly with Hus.

Luther was also afraid he might share the fate of Hus on more than one occasion. In 1415 (the same year as the battle of Agincourt further West), Hus was burned at the stake in breach of a safe conduct promise given him by the Emperor Sigismund who had convened a meeting at Constance. In fact, this worked in Luther’s favour. A war in

Prague resulted, Sigismund never lived this down, and so the promise of safe conduct given to Luther was never likely to be broken.

Hus had been heavily influenced by Wycliffe. Richard II had married a Bohemian Queen who took an interest in Wycliffe and introduced his books to Prague. As a student he spent his last four coins buying an indulgence. At age 31 he was made Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in Charles University (which you can see today) and the following year the Rector. Hus was impressed by two cartoons. One of them represented Jesus wearing a crown of thorns and the Pope a crown of gold and robes of purple and silk. The second showed a picture of Jesus saying to the woman in John 8 “Thy sins are forgiven thee” and on the reverse side the Pope selling indulgences to the people. The cartoons eloquently proclaimed the sad condition of the church.

Hus also took a position as preacher at Prague’s Bethlehem chapel, which I have also visited, but unusually for the time preaching only in Czech. In this, he was again like Wycliffe. He taught that Scripture possesses unique authority as the Law of God to which the Pope must submit. The patristics and declaration of church leaders at all times should also be doctrine so long as subject to the Bible. In “de ecclesia” he wrote that the only head of the church is Christ, and that the true church is wider than the Roman church (including the Greek Orthodox, separate since 1054 and many other churches).

In 1411 Hus vehemently denounced indulgence selling as “trafficking in sacred things” and heretical. Like Luther, he alluded to the Pope as Antichrist. Like Luther, he was excommunicated, but protected by the mass of popular support he enjoyed. When finally brought before a council he was judged an obstinate heretic and a disciple of Wycliffe. As he was being burned, he knelt and said, “I am willing patiently and publicly to endure this dreadful, shameful and cruel death for the sake of thy Gospel and the preaching of thy Word.” He had a crown saying “This is an arch-heretic” which fell off, and was put back on upside down, “that he may be burnt with the devils he has served,” the mob jeered. “God is my witness,” he declared, “that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached save with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. In the truth of the Gospel I have written, taught and preached; today I will gladly die.”

### Luther and Wesley

While there are a lot of differences between these two reformers, what I would single out with them and Hus was that they desired to reform the current church. In a sense, they both failed to do this – hence the Lutheran and Methodist denominations. The church would not allow itself to be reformed. They would both describe themselves, at least early on in their protests, as loyal sons of the church, seeking change from within. They left when they were kicked out.

There is a good lesson here, also to be found in Gene Edwards’ book, “A Tale of Three Kings.” You should not leave until told to do so. Until then, you must work for reform from within. This is what happened with the ICOC in 1988 when the mainline Churches of Christ decided to withdraw fellowship. Nobody set out to create a new group. God knows how hard Kip and others tried to take the whole Church of Christ with us.

Interestingly, Luther anticipated Wesley in being pro-monarchy. Wesley supported the King and preached against rebellion in the American colonies. In putting down the peasants’ revolt in Germany, Luther supported the stability of the nation. Both men cared

deeply about the poor and were therefore likely champions of revolution. (Luther himself was of peasant stock.) Being misunderstood in this way was not unknown to Jesus either.

Luther wrote an essay, *On Temporal Authority, the Extent to which it should be obeyed*, in which he insisted that no-one had the right to rebel against those to whom God had given the task to govern. Wesley wrote a similar *Address to our American Colonies*. When they were being looked at with suspicion by the authorities, such writings saved their positions of favour.

## Appendix B Luther and the Devil

The first song listed in our UK songbook's index is Luther's best-known hymn "A mighty fortress". The tune may be old, but the theme is very much in keeping with the ICOC – the spiritual battle against Satan and his forces.

*A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing;  
Our helper he, amid the flood Of mortal ills prevailing;  
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right man on our side, The man of God's own choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He!  
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same,  
And he must win the battle.*

*And though this world, with demons filled, Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God has willed His truth to triumph through us;  
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, or lo, his doom is sure:  
One little Word<sup>6</sup> shall fell him.*

*(translated Frederick H. Hedge)*

And then an autobiographical verse omitted from the present version of Songs of the United Kingdom

*God's word, for all their craft and force, One moment will not linger,  
But spite of hell, shall have its course; 'Tis written by his finger.  
And, though they take our life, Goods, honour, children, wife,  
Yet is their profit small: These things shall vanish all:  
The city of God remaineth.*

*(translated Thomas Carlyle 1795-1881)*

Men and women in the Middle Ages were all too aware of the demons around them. It was during a thunderstorm that Luther got so frightened of God he resolved to become a monk. In later life he could see demons and heretics all around him. The Pope was Antichrist. It was good that while he preached these things he resisted the use of the secular power to enforce any of these views.

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<sup>6</sup> The little Word is Christ.



## Appendix C Luther the Pastor

Luther kept up copious correspondence, which is one reason we know so much about him. His harshness should not make us forget his virtues, including his good sense of humour and genuine care for people. When the plague came to his town and the University moved temporarily, he stayed in Wittenberg, believing that while families should move, this did not mean everybody should. He wrote “Whether one may flee from a deadly plague” on this subject.

The day before he died he was travelling to try to reconcile two friends. Before the Peasants’ War he worked hard both urging the Princes to listen to the people’s demands and urging the Peasants that revolt was not a godly way to achieve your ends.

A barber friend of his, Peter Beskendorf, once asked Luther to give him some pointers on prayer. In reply, he wrote a 34 page manual, “A simple way to pray, for a good friend.” These are some choice passages.

### On babbling

“What else is it but to tempt God if the mouth babbles and the heart be wandering elsewhere? It is like the priest who prayed in this way:

*Make haste, O God, to deliver me.*

Servant, have you unhitched the horses?

*Make haste to help me, O Lord.*

Maid, go milk the cow.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.*

Run, boy, pox upon you!”

“I often heard this kind of prayer when I was under the papacy; and almost all their prayers are like that. This is only to mock God and it would be better just to play at it, if they cannot or will not do any better than this.”

### He was refreshingly open

“Unfortunately, in my day, I myself prayed these canonical hours many a time in such a way that the psalm... was over before I was conscious whether I was at the beginning or the middle.”

“First, whenever I feel that I have grown cold and disinclined to pray... I take my little Psalter, hasten into my room...”

“Guard yourself carefully against such false and deceitful thoughts that keep whispering: “Wait awhile. In an hour or so I will pray. I must first finish this or that.” Thinking such thoughts, we get away from prayer into business that will hold us and involve us till the prayer of the day comes to naught.”

“Therefore it is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last of the evening.”

He often prayed through the Lord's prayer or the Ten Commandments, believing that Scripture should fill our thoughts to enable us to pray well. With the ten commandments, he would produce from each "a garland of four twisted strands."

"I take each commandment first as teaching, which is what it actually is, and reflect on what our Lord God so earnestly requires of me here. Secondly, I make of it a thanksgiving. Thirdly, a confession. Fourthly, a prayer."

Luther took this approach with the Psalms, Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer or the Sermon on the Mount, but I have found it can be beneficial with many other Scriptures. To illustrate, I read Matthew 18 this morning. Verse 2 says "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." I then prayed through it as follows:-

**Instruction.** I believe that only those like little children will go to heaven. This is very challenging, but as Jesus said it, it is true.

**Praise.** It is amazing, God's heart for the weak and humble. Tony Blair surrounds himself with pop-stars. In the Middle Ages, courtiers were great men of arms, wealth or literature. God chooses those who are like little children to come near him. We have a truly great and loving God!

**Confession.** What signs are there of my own pride? Do I trust like a little child? Sorry, God. Do I respect all others who God has accepted, or do I look down on any other Christian? Sorry, God. Am I secure in my acceptance, believing this verse? Am I more concerned if I am accepted by others? Sorry, God.

**Prayer.** For the proud among the disciples, because they may miss heaven if they don't change. For the children, that they make it. For X to get humble so he can make it.

Luther looked on these four strands as four books, "as a little book of teaching, a hymn book, a book of confession, and a prayer book."

And one last thought on prayer from Luther the Pastor:

"As a shoemaker makes a shoe, and a tailor makes a coat, so a Christian ought to pray. Prayer is the daily business of a Christian."

## Appendix D The 95 Theses

### **Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences by Dr. Martin Luther (1517)**

Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter.

In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said Poenitentiam agite, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh.
4. The penalty [of sin], therefore, continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring into subjection to His vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to them, nothing should be imposed on the dying.
9. Therefore the Holy Spirit in the pope is kind to us, because in his decrees he always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.
10. Ignorant and wicked are the doings of those priests who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penances for purgatory.
11. This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept.
12. In former times the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties; they are already dead to canonical rules, and have a right to be released from them.
14. The imperfect health [of soul], that is to say, the imperfect love, of the dying brings with it, of necessity, great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear.
15. This fear and horror is sufficient of itself alone (to say nothing of other things) to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.
17. With souls in purgatory it seems necessary that horror should grow less and love increase.
18. It seems unproved, either by reason or Scripture, that they are outside the state of merit, that is to say, of increasing love.
19. Again, it seems unproved that they, or at least that all of them, are certain or assured of their own blessedness, though we may be quite certain of it.
20. Therefore by "full remission of all penalties" the pope means not actually "of all," but only of those imposed by himself.
21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved;

22. Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to the canons, they would have had to pay in this life.
23. If it is at all possible to grant to any one the remission of all penalties whatsoever, it is certain that this remission can be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to the very fewest.
24. It must needs be, therefore, that the greater part of the people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
25. The power which the pope has, in a general way, over purgatory, is just like the power which any bishop or curate has, in a special way, within his own diocese or parish.
26. The pope does well when he grants remission to souls [in purgatory], not by the power of the keys (which he does not possess), but by way of intercession.
27. They preach men who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out [of purgatory].
28. It is certain that when the penny jingles into the money-box, gain and avarice can be increased, but the result of the intercession of the Church is in the power of God alone.
29. Who knows whether all the souls in purgatory wish to be bought out of it, as in the legend of Sts. Severinus and Paschal.
30. No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere; much less that he has attained full remission.
31. Rare as is the man that is truly penitent, so rare is also the man who truly buys indulgences, i.e., such men are most rare.
32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon.
33. Men must be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to Him;
34. For these "graces of pardon" concern only the penalties of sacramental satisfaction, and these are appointed by man.
35. They preach no Christian doctrine who teach that contrition is not necessary in those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessionals.
36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.
37. Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon.
38. Nevertheless, the remission and participation [in the blessings of the Church] which are granted by the pope are in no way to be despised, for they are, as I have said, the declaration of divine remission.
39. It is most difficult, even for the very keenest theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the abundance of pardons and [the need of] true contrition.
40. True contrition seeks and loves penalties, but liberal pardons only relax penalties and cause them to be hated, or at least, furnish an occasion [for hating them].
41. Apostolic pardons are to be preached with caution, lest the people may falsely think them preferable to other good works of love.

42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend the buying of pardons to be compared in any way to works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons;
44. Because love grows by works of love, and man becomes better; but by pardons man does not grow better, only more free from penalty.
45. 45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.
46. Christians are to be taught that unless they have more than they need, they are bound to keep back what is necessary for their own families, and by no means to squander it on pardons.
47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of pardons is a matter of free will, and not of commandment.
48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting pardons, needs, and therefore desires, their devout prayer for him more than the money they bring.
49. Christians are to be taught that the pope's pardons are useful, if they do not put their trust in them; but altogether harmful, if through them they lose their fear of God.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the pardon-preachers, he would rather that St. Peter's church should go to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that it would be the pope's wish, as it is his duty, to give of his own money to very many of those from whom certain hawkers of pardons cajole money, even though the church of St. Peter might have to be sold.
52. The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it.
53. They are enemies of Christ and of the pope, who bid the Word of God be altogether silent in some Churches, in order that pardons may be preached in others.
54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or a longer time is spent on pardons than on this Word.
55. It must be the intention of the pope that if pardons, which are a very small thing, are celebrated with one bell, with single processions and ceremonies, then the Gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
56. The "treasures of the Church," out of which the pope grants indulgences, are not sufficiently named or known among the people of Christ.
57. That they are not temporal treasures is certainly evident, for many of the vendors do not pour out such treasures so easily, but only gather them.
58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the Saints, for even without the pope, these always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outward man.
59. St. Lawrence said that the treasures of the Church were the Church's poor, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.
60. Without rashness we say that the keys of the Church, given by Christ's merit, are that treasure;

61. For it is clear that for the remission of penalties and of reserved cases, the power of the pope is of itself sufficient.
62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.
63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.
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 they formerly were wont to fish for men of riches.
66. The treasures of the indulgences are nets with which they now fish for the riches of men.
67. The indulgences which the preachers cry as the "greatest graces" are known to be truly such, in so far as they promote gain.
68. Yet they are in truth the very smallest graces compared with the grace of God and the piety of the Cross.
69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of apostolic pardons, with all reverence.
70. But still more are they bound to strain all their eyes and attend with all their ears, lest these men preach their own dreams instead of the commission of the pope.
71. He who speaks against the truth of apostolic pardons, let him be anathema and accursed!
72. But he who guards against the lust and license of the pardon-preachers, let him be blessed!
73. The pope justly thunders against those who, by any art, contrive the injury of the traffic in pardons.
74. But much more does he intend to thunder against those who use the pretext of pardons to contrive the injury of holy love and truth.
75. To think the papal pardons so great that they could absolve a man even if he had committed an impossible sin and violated the Mother of God -- this is madness.
76. We say, on the contrary, that the papal pardons are not able to remove the very least of venial sins, so far as its guilt is concerned.
77. It is said that even St. Peter, if he were now Pope, could not bestow greater graces; this is blasphemy against St. Peter and against the pope.
78. We say, on the contrary, that even the present pope, and any pope at all, has greater graces at his disposal; to wit, the Gospel, powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in I. Corinthians xii.
79. To say that the cross, emblazoned with the papal arms, which is set up [by the preachers of indulgences], is of equal worth with the Cross of Christ, is blasphemy.
80. The bishops, curates and theologians who allow such talk to be spread among the people, will have an account to render.
81. This unbridled preaching of pardons makes it no easy matter, even for learned men, to rescue the reverence due to the pope from slander, or even from the shrewd questionings of the laity.
82. To wit: -- "Why does not the pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of 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 reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial."

83. Again: -- "Why are mortuary and anniversary masses for the dead continued, and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded on their behalf, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"

84. Again: -- "What is this new piety of God and the pope, that for money they allow a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God, and do not rather, because of that pious and beloved soul's own need, free it for pure love's sake?"

85. Again: -- "Why are the penitential canons long since in actual fact and through disuse abrogated and dead, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences, as though they were still alive and in force?"

86. Again: -- "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is to-day greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?"

87. Again: -- "What is it that the pope remits, and what participation does he grant to those who, by perfect contrition, have a right to full remission and participation?"

88. Again: -- "What greater blessing could come to the Church than if the pope were to do a hundred times a day what he now does once, and bestow on every believer these remissions and participations?"

89. "Since the pope, by his pardons, seeks the salvation of souls rather than money, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons granted heretofore, since these have equal efficacy?"

90. To repress these arguments and scruples of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the Church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies, and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, pardons were preached according to the spirit and mind of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved; nay, they would not exist.

92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace!

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross!

94. Christians are to be exhorted that they be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hell;

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven rather through many tribulations, than through the assurance of peace.

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