

The *Ninety Five Theses* (LW 31: 25-33) and Luther's 1545 Recollection in *The Preface to Volume 1 of his Latin Writings* (LW 34: 327-338).

Introduction

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We have been studying Luther for a number of years in preparation for the observance of the 500th anniversary of the posting of the Ninety Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517.¹ Luther had written his theses in Latin, not the vernacular. His intention was to call for a learned consultation among university-level colleagues on the Christian teachings concerning the pardon of punishment for sin and the need of satisfaction for sin. He believed that these doctrines were unsettled and not yet defined by the church, thus open to debate. Thus in the Ninety Five Theses he emphasized that he was criticizing fellow Germans, the salesmen of the indulgences, as “false prophets:” not only for blasphemously marketing divine grace but in the process also misusing the name and authority of the pope. It will be several years before Luther comes to the dire conclusion that the papal office is Antichrist.

While he certainly expected some flack, Luther just as certainly did not expect the conflagration which quickly erupted and led to that dramatic conclusion about the papal Antichrist. His Latin was translated into German without his knowledge and so the Ninety Five Theses were popularized and spread across German speaking lands. Some of the technical language was unintelligible to the contemporary laity (as it is to us today), delving into the legalese of canonical regulation. Almost immediately in the new year of 1518 consequently Luther prepared and published a lengthy treatise, *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*, material we will study next in this series. Simultaneously, he composed fifty theses on the Remission of Sins for his monastic order. Only recently translated into English, it is in these Fifty Theses, according to Oswald Bayer, that Luther, pushed forward in discovery by the controversy, matured to his view on the certainty of faith. The certainty of faith in Christ's word Luther now opposed to the false certainty or security placed in works, let alone indulgences. This new emphasis on the certainty of faith in Christ is a difference in emphasis, since the Ninety Five Theses were focused on attacking false certainty, spiritual security based on human words or promises.

Only after these opening flourishes in the controversy did Luther defend his appeal to the authority of Scripture in a pastoral conversation with the pope's representative, Cardinal Cajetan, in Augsburg during the same tumultuous year of 1518, about which Luther published a report. Then, in debate with Johannes Eck in Leipzig he acknowledged that, when opposed to Scripture “churches and councils can err.” This admission transformed the question under debate. No longer was the propriety of indulgences or even Luther's emerging doctrine of the certainty of faith in Christ's words at the center of the storm. But his opponents, the German “papists,” had

¹ While there has been some debate whether the iconic moment of Luther's nailing the theses to the door of the castle church reflects historical reality, what is indisputable is that on October 31, 1517 Luther mailed his theses to Bishop Albert of Mainz calling him to account for the preaching of the indulgence sellers operating under his name and authority. See Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, ed. Kurt Aland (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974) 69-71

succeeded in changing the subject. The question was now authority in the church and it was primarily on this basis that Luther was eventually excommunicated – and in turn excommunicated the papacy by the public burning of the bull. This is the material that we will be studying in these months of this series.

Such study will be an interesting self-examination for us. In his little book on the Ninety Five Theses Prof. Timothy Wengert reports that a contemporary layman, upon reading the Ninety Five Theses, commented to him that “they aren’t very Lutheran!”² This revealing remark reflects a double truth.

First, the truth about Luther already alluded: Luther had not yet realized all the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith, especially that *faith is certain* because it takes the believer out of self-preoccupation, even religious self-preoccupation, into God with trust and to the neighbor in love by the mediation of Christ in Word and sacrament. In the Ninety Five Theses, however, Luther was predominantly still attacking false security that is placed in one’s own works and preparations, let alone in the “childish” abuse of buying salvation in the form of indulgences – bribes, really. The certainty of faith that can rest in God’s grace as delivered in Christ is not yet accented, even though in hindsight we can detect intimations of the “true treasure of the church, which is the gospel of the glory and grace of God.”

So the reader who comes to the text of the Ninety Five Theses knowing the Lutheran theology of justification by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone from the Scriptures alone can be taken aback by the emphasis on “penalties and the cross.” These *pains*, Luther emphasizes, are divinely given *aids* to be *welcomed* by the pilgrim disciple on her perilous journey of purification on the narrow way to heaven. Moreover, in the Ninety Five Theses Luther rejects neither the papacy, purgatory nor even indulgences properly understood. Indeed, the over-riding message is, as I often put it to students: “Purgatory *without delay* – purgatory *now!*” The Luther of the Ninety Five Theses thus *seems* more Catholic than the pope. Indeed, he *was*, as the Luther who almost 30 years later reflected back on the outbreak of the controversy expressed with some embarrassment: “I was once a monk and a most enthusiastic papist when I began that cause.”

Second, a truth about us today: the layman’s remark reported by Prof. Wengert tells an ocean about the contemporary Lutheran heresy of cheap grace, in so far as the theology of the cross in the Ninety Five Thesis can no longer be recognized as “Lutheran.” Luther to be sure abandoned the *rhetoric* of his “theology of the cross” but he never rejected the *substance* of his view: it is the theologian of glory who flees “penalties and the cross,” while the true theologian hates with divine love his own, old and sinful self. Luther in fact utilizes this theology of the cross, as we shall see, in his defense of the Ninety Five Theses against the complaint that his attack on indulgences was merciless. What is really in dispute, however, is true as opposed to false consolation of consciences, and, in turn, whether consciences are sorry for sin or merely fearing sin’s punishment.

² Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s 95 Theses with Introduction, Commentary and Study Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015) xiii.

Luther abandoned the rhetoric of the theology of the cross for fear of the misunderstanding that one makes oneself worthy of God's love by hating oneself – a perverse form of works righteousness! Yet it remains true for him that only the penitent can be justified by faith, indeed that faith includes life-long turning from this world of malice and injustice to the Lord who is returning for us to bring in the new creation of God in its glory and fullness. Luther does not so much abandon the theology of the cross in the Ninety Five Theses, then, as surpass it in coming to a new view of God's costly but also lavish victory in Christ's cross for the believer who, despite life-long progress, remains entangled in the sinfulness of this dying world and so lives justly in it now by faith alone in the promise of the forgiveness of sins.

We might well worry about ourselves today, then, if we find the Ninety Five Theses *utterly* strange such that themes of cross-bearing and mortification of the flesh are substantially repudiated in favor of a religiosity of sloppy agape good feeling. To be sure, there is technical discussion in the terms of medieval theology of merits of condignity and merits of congruity and so on that require historical critical clarification for us to understand. But the spiritual gist of the Ninety Five Theses is intelligible and quickly grasped by focusing on the bold introductory thesis and the stirring peroration of the final four.

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance... 92. Away then with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace! [Jeremiah 6:14]. 93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross! 94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell; 95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace [Acts 14:22].

We can conclude this introduction with several significant observations about the beginning and end of the Ninety-Five Theses which provoke questions of self-examination. First, Luther's target is not the pope but the false preaching of Tetzel in selling indulgences. The enemy of grace is false comfort or religious smooth-talk. And false comfort and smooth talking are functions of the religion business, not the business of God's reign. How do we recognize false preaching/prophecy? How do we distinguish the religion business from the business of the Kingdom of God. Second, what is under discussion is not a single, bolt-out-of-the blue moment or event of justification but Christian life, living by faith in the course of life-long repentance, a journey of discipleship "following Christ, the head." How do we understand and teach Christian living, what used to be called "sanctification," in the sense of Habbakuk and Paul that the just will live by their faith? Third, grace is paradoxical in that it demands cross-bearing but delivers true peace and confidence of entering heaven. How do we preach the central paradox, "Christ crucified," that is, the Victor victimized? Explaining these paradoxes took the rest of Luther's theological life, as he reflected autobiographically in the year before his death in the preface to his Latin writings which is here given following the text of the Ninety Five Theses.

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

*Works of Martin Luther:
Adolph Spaeth, L.D. Reed, Henry Eyster Jacobs, et Al., Trans. & Eds.
(Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), Vol. I, pp. 29-38*

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 man 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 confessionalia.
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.

Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Works (1545)
by Dr. Martin Luther, 1483-1546

Translated by Bro. Andrew Thornton, OSB
from the

"Vorrede zu Band I der Opera Latina der Wittenberger Ausgabe. 1545"
in vol. 4 of *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Otto Clemen, 6th ed.,
(Berlin: de Gruyter. 1967). pp. 421-428.

Translator's Note: The material between square brackets is explanatory in nature and is not part of Luther's preface. The terms "just, justice, justify" in the following reading are synonymous with the terms "righteous, righteousness, make righteous." Both sets of English words are common translations of the Latin "justus" and related words. A similar situation exists with the word "faith"; it is synonymous with "belief." Both words can be used to translate Latin "fides." Thus, "We are justified by faith" translates the same original Latin sentence as does "We are made righteous by belief."

Dear Reader,

I have steadfastly resisted those who wanted my books published, or perhaps I had better call them the confused products of my nighttime study. First, I did not want the labors of the ancient authors to be buried under my new works and the reader to be hindered from reading them. Second, there now exists, thanks to the grace of God, a good number of systematically arranged books, especially the "Loci communes" of Philip, [Philip Melancthon, scholar of Greek and associate of Luther at Wittenberg.] from which a theologian or bishop can get a thorough foundation [cf Titus 1:9], so that he might be strong in preaching the doctrine of virtue. Third, and most importantly, the Bible itself is now available in almost every language. The disordered train of events, however, has seen to it that my works resemble a wild, disorganized chaos, which now even I cannot easily put into order.

For these reasons I wanted all my books to be buried in perpetual oblivion, that thus there might be room for better books. But other people, by their bold and unrelenting arguments, badgered me into publishing mine. They maintained that, if I did not permit them to be published while I was alive, people would publish them after I was dead anyway, people ignorant of the sequence of events and of the causes behind them. Thus instead of one confusion, there would be many. I also had to take into account the wish and command of our most illustrious Prince Elector Johann Frederick,

who ordered or rather forced the printers not only to print this edition but also to get it done quickly.

Above all I beg the reader, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to read these works with discernment, or perhaps I should say with compassion. The reader should know that I was once a monk, the most rabid of papists, when I took up this whole affair. I was so drunk, so submerged in the pope's doctrines, that I was ready, if I could, to kill or help kill those who would have advocated by so much as a single syllable withdrawing obedience to the pope. That's how much of a Saul I was [i.e., St. Paul, who, before his conversion, was called Saul and who was zealous in his persecution of Christians], as many still are. I wasn't so icy cold in defending the papacy as was Eck and those like him, who seemed to me to defend the pope more for the sake of their bellies than through serious commitment. To this day they seem to me to be laughing at the pope like Epicureans. I took the matter seriously because I had a horrible fear of the Last Day, yet still wished from the depths of my heart to be saved.

Consequently you will find that, in my earlier writings, I most humbly conceded many important things to the pope, things which I later detested and now detest as being the greatest blasphemy and abomination. Therefore, dear reader, kindly ascribe this error or, as my calumniators call it, this contradiction to the time and to my inexperience. At first I was alone and surely much too inept and unlearned to be dealing with such matters. For, as God is my witness, it was by accident and not by my own will or desire that I got involved in all this turmoil.

When in 1517 indulgences were sold (I wanted to say promulgated) in these regions for disgraceful profit, I was a preacher, a young Doctor of Theology, as they say. I began to dissuade the people from lending an ear to the shouts of the indulgence-sellers. I told them that they had better things to do and that I was sure that in these matters I had the pope on my side. I was relying greatly on his trustworthiness, since in his decrees he had very clearly condemned the excesses of the quaestors [name of a treasury official in ancient Rome] as he called the indulgence preachers.

Shortly thereafter I wrote two letters, one to Albert, the archbishop of Mainz, who was getting half the money from the indulgences (the other half was going to the pope, a fact of which I was at the time ignorant), the other to the ordinary of the place, Jerome, bishop of Brandenburg. I begged them to put a stop

to the shameless blasphemy of the quaestors, but they despised this poor little brother. Therefore, finding myself despised, I published a list of theses and, at the same time, a sermon in German on indulgences. A little later I published the "Explanations," in which, in deference to the pope, I maintained that indulgences should not be condemned but that the works of charity should be preferred to them.

What I did toppled heaven and consumed earth by fire. I am denounced to the pope, commanded to go to Rome, and the entire papacy rises up against me alone. These things happened in 1518 when Maximilian was holding the Diet at Augsburg, at which Cardinal Cajetan was the legate of the pope. The most illustrious Duke Frederick of Saxony, Prince Elector, took up my cause with the Cardinal and asked that I not be forced to go to Rome but that he, Cajetan, should summon me to a hearing and take care of the matter. Shortly thereafter the Diet was adjourned.

Meanwhile the Germans were getting tired of putting up with the plunderings, the buying and selling, and the endless frauds of the Roman rascals. They were waiting with bated breath for the outcome of so important a matter, which neither bishop nor theologian had ever before dared to touch. This mood of the populace encouraged me, because those crafty "Romanations" with which they had filled and fatigued the whole world were now hateful to everyone.

Poor and on foot I came to Augsburg, my expenses paid by Prince Frederick. I had from him letters commending me to the senate and to certain good men. I was there for three days before I approached the Cardinal, because those good men strongly advised me not to go to the Cardinal until I had a safe conduct pass from the Emperor. The Cardinal had been summoning me every day through a certain spokesman. This latter pestered me greatly, saying that if I'd only recant, then everything would be all right. But long the injury, long the detour back.

Finally, on the third day, the spokesman came and demanded to know why I hadn't yet approached the Cardinal, who was waiting to receive me most kindly. I answered that I was complying with the advice of good men to whom I had been commended by Prince Frederick and that they had advised me not to go to see the Cardinal unless I had a safe conduct pass from the Emperor. I said that they were requesting one from the imperial senate and that I would come as soon as it had been obtained. He got very angry and said: "Do you think Prince Frederick is going to take up arms for your sake?" I said, "I don't want him to." He asked, "Where will

you stay?" I replied, "Under heaven." He then asked, "If you had the pope and the cardinals in your power, what would you do?" I said, "I'd show them every reverence and honor." Then He moved his finger in an Italian gesture and said, "Hem." Then he went away and never came back.

The same day the imperial senate informed the Cardinal that I had been given a safe conduct; they warned him that he should not plan to have anything too severe in store for me. It is said that he answered, "Fine, but I shall act according to my duty." These events were the beginning of this whole commotion; the rest can be learned from what follows.

That same year, 1518, Prince Frederick had called Philip Melanchthon here to Wittenberg to teach Greek, doubtless so that I might have a colleague in my labors of teaching theology. His works testify to what the Lord has accomplished through Melanchthon, his instrument, not only in literature but also in theology, despite the fact that Satan and all his brood are infuriated.

The following year, in February of 1519, Emperor Maximilian died, and by the law of the Empire Duke Frederick became vicar. Then the fury of the tempest abated a little, and gradually excommunication, the papal thunderbolt, came to be held in contempt. Eck and Caraccioli brought from Rome a bull [a papal decree] condemning me. The former conveyed it to Wittenberg, the latter to Duke Frederick, who was at the time in Cologne, where he and the other princes were to receive Charles, the newly elected Emperor. Duke Frederick got very indignant at that papal rascal and courageously told him off in no uncertain terms because in his absence he and Eck had disturbed his dominions and those of his brother. He gave them such a magnificent tongue lashing that they went away from him shamed and disgraced. The prince, endowed as he was with unbelievable natural ability, knew all about the crafty ways of the Roman curia [the administrative apparatus of the Roman Church]; he knew exactly how to treat them. He was a man with a good clear nose, and he could smell more and farther than the Romanists could either hope or fear.

Thereafter they stopped testing Frederick. Furthermore, he paid no honor to the rose that they call "golden" [a special mark of papal esteem] which Leo X sent him that same year; on the contrary, he ridiculed it. Thus the Romanists were forced to give up any hope of duping such a prince. The Gospel advanced successfully under the protection of this prince and was propagated far and wide. His

authority influenced many; since he was a most wise and keen-sighted prince, he could incur no suspicion, except among the hateful, that he was out to encourage and support heresy. This did the papacy great harm.

In the same year, 1519, there was held at Leipzig the debate to which Eck had challenged Karlstadt and me. But by no letter of mine could I secure a safe conduct from Duke George, and so I entered Leipzig not as a debater but as a spectator under the safe conduct which had been given to Karlstadt. I don't know who was blocking my way, since I was sure that, up to that time, Duke George had not been hostile to me.

In Leipzig Eck came to me in my lodgings. He said he had learned that I had refused to debate. I answered, "How can I debate if I can't secure a safe conduct from Duke George?" He answered, "I came here to debate with you, and if I can't, then I don't want to debate with Karlstadt either. What if I get a safe conduct for you? Will you debate with me then?" I said, "Get it and I will." He left, and shortly thereafter I too got a safe conduct and so had the opportunity of debating.

Eck did this because he thought he would cover himself with glory in debating my proposition in which I denied that the pope was the head of the church by divine right. In this proposition Eck had a golden opportunity of flattering the pope and of meriting his thanks and of overwhelming me with hatred and ill-will. That is exactly what he did throughout the whole debate, but he neither proved his position nor refuted mine. Even Duke George said to Eck and me at breakfast, "Whether it's by divine right or by human right, still he's the pope." If he hadn't been influenced by the arguments, he would never have said such a thing but would have approved of Eck alone.

From my case you can see how hard it is to struggle free from errors which become fixed by universal standard and changed by time-honored custom into nature. How true the proverb is: "It's hard to abandon customs" and "Custom is a second nature." How right Augustine was when he said, "Custom, if it is not resisted, becomes necessity." I had been reading and teaching the Sacred Scriptures diligently in private and in public now for seven years, so that I knew almost all of them by heart. Then too, I had imbibed the beginnings of the knowledge of Christ and of faith in him, i.e., that it is faith in Christ and not works that justifies and saves us. Finally, I was now defending publicly that proposition of which I'm speaking, namely, that the pope was not

the head of the church by divine right. But I still didn't see the necessary conclusion, i.e., that the pope must be from the devil, for what is not from God must be from the devil.

I was so absorbed, as I have said, by the example and title of the Holy Church as well as by my own customary way of thinking, that I conceded that the pope was head of the church by human right. However, if that right is not supported by divine authority, then it is a lie and comes from the devil. After all, we obey our parents and the civil authorities, not because they themselves command it, but because God wants us to (cf. 1 Peter). That is why I can, with a little less hatred, put up with those who cling so tenaciously to the papacy, especially those who haven't read the sacred Scriptures or even the secular writings, since I myself had read the sacred Scriptures diligently for so many years and still clung tenaciously to the papacy.

In 1519, as I've already said, Leo X sent the Golden Rose through Karl von Miltitz; with many arguments he urged me to be reconciled to the pope. Miltitz had seventy apostolic briefs, and if Prince Frederick would hand me over, as the pope was asking by sending the Rose, he would post one of the briefs in each town and so conduct me safely to Rome. But Miltitz betrayed to me what was really in his heart when he said, "Martin, I thought you were some aged theologian who used to sit next to the stove and debate with himself, but now I see that you're still a strong young man. If I had twenty-five thousand armed men, I don't think I could convey you to Rome. I've been sounding out the opinions of people along the way to see what they thought of you. For every one for the pope there are three for you against the pope." That's ridiculous! He had asked the women and serving girls in the inns what they thought of the Roman See [the Latin "sedes" = "seat"]. They didn't know what the word meant and, thinking of a household chair, they answered, "How are we supposed to know what kind of chairs you have at Rome? We don't know whether they're made out of wood or stone.

Miltitz begged me, therefore, to do everything I could to make peace, and he would do his best to see that the pope did the same. I promised that I would most promptly do anything that I could in good conscience do. I said that I too wanted peace and that I had been drawn by force into these squabbles and had been forced by circumstances to do everything I did; I was not to blame. Miltitz had summoned the Dominican friar, Johann Tetzel, the originator of this tragedy. With threatening words from the pope he so broke the man, who up to that time had been the terror of all and a fearless

crier of indulgences, that he wasted away and was finally consumed by a mental illness. When I found this out, I wrote him, before he died, a kindly letter in which I comforted him and told him to take heart and not to fear my memory. But perhaps his conscience and the wrath of the pope sent him to the grave.

People thought Miltitz and his line of action were useless, but it seems to me that if the man at Mainz [i.e., Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz] had followed Miltitz's course from the beginning when I had reprimanded him, and if the pope had followed it before he condemned me without a hearing and raged with his bulls, and if they had suppressed Tetzel's fury, the affair wouldn't have resulted in such an uproar. It's all the fault of the man at Mainz, who was tricked by his own cleverness with which he wanted to suppress my doctrine and to save his money which he'd sought through indulgences. Now they seek counsel in vain; now they make efforts in vain. The Lord has awakened and stands to judge the peoples [cf. Psalm 76:9 and Daniel 9:14]. Even if they were able to kill us, they still wouldn't have what they want; in fact, they'd have even less than they have now while we are alive and well. Some among them, whose nose is not completely inactive, can smell this well enough.

Meanwhile in that same year, 1519, I had begun interpreting the Psalms once again. I felt confident that I was now more experienced, since I had dealt in university courses with St. Paul's Letters to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the Letter to the Hebrews. I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: "The justice of God is revealed in it." I hated that word, "justice of God," which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, as they call it, i.e., that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust.

But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, "Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel

threaten us with his justice and his wrath?" This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant.

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.'" I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: "The just person lives by faith." All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

I exalted this sweetest word of mine, "the justice of God," with as much love as before I had hated it with hate. This phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise. Afterward I read Augustine's "On the Spirit and the Letter," in which I found what I had not dared hope for. I discovered that he too interpreted "the justice of God" in a similar way, namely, as that with which God clothes us when he justifies us. Although Augustine had said it imperfectly and did not explain in detail how God imputes justice to us, still it pleased me that he taught the justice of God by which we are justified.

Better armed now with these thoughts, I began for the second time to interpret the Psalms. The work would have grown into a large commentary, but I was summoned the following year to Worms for the Diet convened by Emperor Charles V and so had once again to leave the work I had begun.

I am telling you all this, dear reader, so that, if you are going to read my little works, you should remember that I am one of those, as I said above, who, as Augustine writes of himself, makes progress by writing and teaching. I am not one of those who out of nothing suddenly become perfect (although in fact they are nothing), who don't work, who aren't tempted, who have no

experience, but who, with one look into the Scriptures, exhaust their whole spirit.

Up to that point, 1520-21, the indulgence affair was still going on. There followed the affairs dealing with the sacraments and with the Anabaptists, about which I will write prefaces in other volumes, if I live to do so.

Good-bye in the Lord, dear reader, and pray that the word may increase against Satan, because he is powerful and evil. And now he has become extremely vicious and savage because he knows that he has only a short time and that the kingdom of his pope is endangered. May God strengthen in us what he has accomplished. May he prosper his work which he has begun in us for his glory [cf. Phillipians 1:6 and Psalm 68:29]. Amen.

This translation was made by Bro. Andrew Thornton, OSB, for the Saint Anselm College Humanities Program. It is distributed by Project Wittenberg with the permission of the author.