

From the 95 Theses of Martin Luther, 1517 (As a young man)

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; . . .

32. They (the preachers of indulgences) will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon. . . .

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. . . .

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; . . .

86. . . . "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today 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?"

Martin Luther: "The Jews & their Lies" (As an Old man)

Martin Luther, a lawyer-turned-priest from Germany, had sought to reform the Catholic Church of the corruption he felt had defiled the faith. At the beginning of his career, Martin Luther was apparently sympathetic to Jewish resistance to the Catholic Church. However, he expected the Jews to convert to his purified Christianity; when they did not, he turned violently against them.

Luther used violent and vulgar language throughout his career. While we do not expect religious figures to use this sort of language in the modern world, but it was not uncommon in the early 16th century.

The following are excerpts from Luther's work entitled "The Jews & their Lies":

I had made up my mind to write no more either about the Jews or against them. But since I learned that these miserable and accursed people do not cease to lure to themselves even us, that is, the Christians, I have published this little book, so that I might be found among those who opposed such poisonous activities of the Jews who warned the Christians to be on their guard against them.

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Therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in which sheer self glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and vehemently on them.

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Moreover, they are nothing but thieves and robbers who daily eat no morsel and wear no thread of clothing which they have not stolen and pilfered from us by means of their accursed usury. Thus they live from day to day, together with wife and child, by theft and robbery, as archthieves and robbers, in the most impenitent security.

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No, one should toss out these lazy rogues (the Jews) by the seat of their pants...and then eject them forever from this country. For, as we have heard, God's anger with them is so intense that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little. Therefore, in any case, away with them!

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What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming.... I shall give you my sincere advice:

First to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord ...

Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed....Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them... Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. Fifth, I advise that safeconduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like. Let them stay at home... Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping...Seventh, I commend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow,

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I wish and I ask that our rulers who have Jewish subjects exercise a sharp mercy toward these wretched people, as suggested above, to see whether this might not help (though it is doubtful). They must act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone, and marrow. Such a procedure must also be followed in this instance. Burn down their synagogues,... force them to work, and deal harshly with them, as Moses did in the wilderness, slaying three thousand lest the whole people perish.

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My essay, I hope, will furnish a Christian (who in any case has no desire to become a Jew) with enough material not only to defend himself against the blind, venomous Jews, but also to become the foe of the Jews' malice, lying, and cursing, and to understand not only that their belief is false but that they are surely possessed by all devils. May Christ, our dear Lord, convert them mercifully and preserve us steadfastly and immovably in the knowledge of him, which is eternal life. Amen.

Questions.

- 1) In the 95 Thesis, what was his attitude towards: The Pope, The Poor, Pardons/Salvation
- 2) By the end of Martin Luther's life, what was his attitude towards the Jews? Why did he feel this way?
- 3) What did Martin Luther believe should be done to the Jews?
- 4) How is Martin Luther's 95 Thesis different from The Jews and Their Lies?