



2023

## Ecclesiological Sovereignty: Toward an Understanding of the Sovereignty of the Pope in the Context of Luther's Responses

Erik Lee Grayvold

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses)



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Grayvold, Erik Lee, "Ecclesiological Sovereignty: Toward an Understanding of the Sovereignty of the Pope in the Context of Luther's Responses" (2023). *Master's Theses*. 4495.

[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/4495](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/4495)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 2023 Erik Lee Grayvold

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ECCLESIOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY: TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
SOVEREIGNTY OF THE POPE IN THE CONTEXT OF LUTHER'S RESPONSES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY

REV. ERIK GRAYVOLD

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2023

Copyright by Erik Grayvold, 2023  
All rights reserved.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I want to thank several people who helped me get this project off the ground. I want to thank Dr. Colby Dickinson, my director, for introducing me to the topic of sovereignty, which gave me a focus for this project. I am also grateful to Dr. Miquel Diaz, my reader, who also taught me my first theology course at Loyola on the topic of ecclesiology, which played a significant role in this project. This project would not have happened had Dr. Chris Skinner not encouraged me to write this thesis as my capstone project at Loyola. I would also like to thank my spouse, Angela, for her support throughout this degree and the next.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- BC *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert  
(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
- FC *Formula of Concord*.
- LW *Luther's Works* [American edition], ed. Helmut Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan,  
55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986).
- SA *Smalcald Articles*.
- TAL *The Annotated Luther*, ed. Hillerbrand, Hans J.; Stjerna, Kirsi I.; and Wengert,  
Timothy J., 6 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015-2017).
- Tr *Treatise Against the Power and Primacy of the Pope*.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

I want to start by making it clear what my motivations are regarding this project. This project will be the first steps in creating a Lutheran or Luther response to Christian nationalism in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century. While the United States has certainly had issues of Christian nationalism throughout its existence, the twenty-first century marks a shift in its dynamics.<sup>2</sup> This movement binds parts of the Christian tradition with national identity creating a system infused with white supremacy, misogyny, and other forms of hate. In Christian nationalism, one can only be a “true American” if that one is Christian.<sup>3</sup> This movement has resorted to violence due to “deep stories” that inform members of the movement of an ahistorical reading of history.<sup>4</sup> So what does this current issue have to do with Luther and the papacy? Nothing directly, but I want to explore Luther’s response to the authority and sovereignty of the popes. I also do not want this project to be a survey of every instance where Luther mentions something against the papacy. Instead, I want to identify the nature of Luther’s perspective in terms of its anti-authoritarian tendencies. Using this approach, I hope to inspect further the boundaries between sovereignty, authority, anti-authoritarian resistance, violence, and, ultimately, nationalism from a Christian point of view.

---

<sup>1</sup> All quoted biblical texts are from the NRSVUE unless I note otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Shortle et al., “Americans are Growing More.”

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back*, ix.

<sup>4</sup> Gorski and Perry, *The Flag and the Cross*, 4.

This goal does not deny that Luther sometimes took an authoritarian perspective, such as in the Peasant's war.<sup>5</sup> It does not deny the reception of Luther by the German National Church during the Nazi era, especially regarding texts such as *On the Jews and their Lies*. However, this perspective runs counter to scholars such as Erich Fromm, who characterizes Luther as a textbook example of a masochistic authoritarian character that matched the sentiment and ambitions of Nazi Germany.<sup>6</sup> Luther's life was the Church, and his early concerns that led to his papal arguments sprung from pastoral concerns.<sup>7</sup> While his ego certainly overcomes him in his writings occasionally, Luther has a genuine concern for humanity and its well-being.

In the same way, I also want to step back from the argument of Carl Schmitt (and later Agamben) regarding a modernist perspective of society and sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> However, Carl Schmitt does offer some help in why he worked towards his definition of "sovereignty." He writes:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.<sup>9</sup>

He argues that the theological concepts of power and authority have switched from God as the central figure to the lawmaker. However, this observation of Schmitt's only touches the surface

---

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the Peasants' War, see Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 414f.

<sup>6</sup> Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 63-65.

<sup>7</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 58. Lull and Nelson also demonstrate Luther's concern over the proper teaching of the laity (Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 45).

<sup>8</sup> Schmitt defines the sovereign as "he who decides the exception" (see Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5).

<sup>9</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

of what the Reformation triggered regarding ecclesiological sovereignty and, later, governmental power.

Christianity, in its ancient roots, aimed to bring together humanity not as individual tribes but rather as societies of individuals. “It rests on the conviction that we ought to recognize and respect the difference between inner conviction and external conformity,” a sentiment that can be traced from Paul to Luther.<sup>10</sup> Luther continued a long trend in Christianity in which one’s faith differs from any participation in governmental rule. For Luther, in particular, this sentiment became focused on the papacy seeing itself as the gatekeeper to Christ instead of a servant of Christ’s church, thus using this sentiment to play politics with secular rulers.

I aim to demonstrate how Luther’s response to papal sovereignty offers a theological foundation that can also counter Christian nationalism. First, I will briefly analyze the roots of papal power until the Reformation era. Next, I will draw from a few of Luther’s writings from different eras of Luther’s life that demonstrate his changing perspectives towards the papacy, what drove those changes, and how those perspectives became foundational to Lutheran identity. In my conclusion, I will draw out elements of Luther’s response that can apply to a response to Christian nationalism. Ultimately, I want to demonstrate how Luther’s hermeneutics and ecclesiology offer the most potential when addressing Christian nationalism.

---

<sup>10</sup> Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 354. See also Galatians 3:23-29.



## PAPAL POWER AND SOVEREIGNTY

In order to understand papal power and sovereignty, one must understand the history behind it. However, history is not the only tool; theologians can gain insight from other tools, such as sociology. In particular, Vaillancourt gives some definitions for power, authority, and control:

Power is not only actual participation in a decision-making process. It is also a more generalized capacity to influence or to affect social activities, or as Amitai Etzioni puts it, “a capacity to overcome part of all of the resistances, to introduce changes in the face of opposition.” Power is not necessarily coercive (i.e., based on the use of force). It can also be persuasive (in which case it is quite similar to influence) or utilitarian (i.e. economic). The concept of authority is somewhat akin to that of power, with the added connotation of legitimacy...It has to do with legitimate, institutionalized, officially sanctioned power...Control is another related concept, but its meaning is more fluid than that of power or authority. It can refer to the internalization of norms and values, but it can also refer to coercive, remunerative, or normative power used by a social agent to compel or convince another social agent to abide by certain rules, or to stay in line.<sup>1</sup>

Luther questioned the papacy on all these levels through scripture and the church's history.

However, Protestants of all stripes must be careful in understanding when things came into being as official church practice versus what led up to that point. An excellent example is the idea of papal infallibility, which was not confirmed until Vatican I in 1870 though it certainly had some early roots and supporters in the Reformation era.<sup>2</sup> As such, I will look at four specific areas where supporters of papal primacy found backing for their arguments during the Reformation:

---

<sup>1</sup> Vaillancourt, *Papal Power*, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Vaillancourt, *Papal Power*, 2.

Matthew 16:13-20 and John 21:15-21, interactions with emperors Constantine and Charlemagne, the Gregorian reform, and conciliarism in the Roman church.

### Scripture

Many scholars have written and disputed the issue of scripture versus tradition in dialogues between the Roman Church and Protestants. Nevertheless, both Christian entities use scripture and tradition to justify their stance on many theological and ecclesiological topics. While this topic could be a whole project, this thesis will instead focus on two pieces of scripture that Luther's opponents used to justify Papal power. O'Malley argues that for a Roman Catholic, these passages describe Peter's unique identity and the office given to him. This office gets passed to his successors: the popes of Rome.<sup>3</sup>

Very few people dispute the importance of Peter both in scripture and the early church. He plays significant leadership roles within the Gospels, Acts, Paul's and Pauline letters, and the pastoral letters. The Roman Church considers him the first pope and a foundational figure of the whole papacy. While many texts get used in the debates over papal power, Matthew 16:13-20 and John 21:15-19 stand out in particular. While the papacy and Luther receive these texts in their own way, I believe some exploration from contemporary Biblical scholarship can shed some nuances on these texts. Clarifying the underlying issues in these texts and confirming whether or not the papacy's authority derived from the text or in the text's reception will help form a better picture of what the papacy looked like at the flashpoint of the Reformation.

*Which Rock?*

---

<sup>3</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 7.

Peter's confession in Matthew 16 sets the tone for this passage. In answering the question regarding the "Son of Man," Jesus praises Peter by stating that this insight came from the Father and not through "flesh and blood." This statement contrasts with Matt 14:33, where the disciples make a similar confession after seeing Jesus rescue Peter from the sea.<sup>4</sup> Jesus's response to this particular confession makes a similar difference that raises several exegetical questions surrounding the redaction of Matthew in terms of the chronological order of 14:33 versus 16:18 or even giving a better picture of Peter to fit traditions. While many have written on this particular subject, this project will focus on more ecclesiological concerns that depend on the authority of this text.

The first concern involves the wordplay between Πέτρος and πέτρα and the specific antecedent for the dative phrase ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ (upon this rock). The change in gender between "Peter" and "rock" begs the question of whether or not the church of Jesus will be built on Peter or something else within the text. Some scholarship proposes that Matthew's Gospel has Aramaic roots in which the discrepancy between these two words in Greek would not exist. As such, a conclusion can be made that the church is built on Peter instead of the content of his confession of Jesus's identity.<sup>5</sup> Luz and Couch also agree with this sentiment and describe how this moment becomes a special moment for Peter. By referring to him as "Simon Peter," Matthew draws the reader into the special moment where Jesus bestows Peter a particular office where the church shall grow. However, they quickly note that this office does not continue to

---

<sup>4</sup> Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament*, 105-106.

<sup>5</sup> Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament*, 90-92.

anyone else, but Peter holds it into perpetuity. Every new generation of Christians continues the activity upon Peter's foundation, who uniquely receives the divine revelation of Jesus's identity.<sup>6</sup>

It bears mentioning then what the "keys to the kingdom of heaven" bear on this conversation. While Peter receives these keys in this pericope, it bears mentioning that the other disciples gain these keys in Matt 18:18. Given the ecumenical nature of Brown *et al.*'s project, they try to steer away from making any direct claims on whether or not this pericope gives biblical support for the papacy. They mention the nature of Rabbinic tradition in terms of the authority to bind and loosen while simultaneously acknowledging a potential issue in the Matthean community regarding an influx of Gentile converts into its original majority Jewish demographics.<sup>7</sup> If verse 18 ties into verse 19, then the prospect of binding and loosening of doctrinal decisions becomes a power centralized to Peter or at least until Matt 18:18.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Brown *et al.* acknowledge that Peter maintains priority due to the ecclesiological implications in the use of ἐκκλησία or "church" being built upon Peter.<sup>9</sup> This very point insists then on a receptionist interpretation of the text, thus taking the idea and repurposing it for the use of the church. From a historical standpoint, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that Peter stands out as someone special within Matt 16, but for it to represent the foundation of Peter as the first pope seems unlikely. Instead, the papacy comes as a later development which receives this text in a way that puts Peter into that office.

---

<sup>6</sup> Luz and Crouch, "Jesus' Withdrawal from Israel," 362, 376-377.

<sup>7</sup> See Matt 8:11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament*, 95-99.

<sup>9</sup> Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament*, 106.

*Feeding Sheep and Pastors*

The church also received John 21 as justification for the Papacy of Peter, yet most scholars agree that this text was a later redaction. Moloney argues first that John 20:30-31 functions as a better conclusion to the overall story of John. Second, the chapter displays many unique language structures for the first time in the Gospel. Third, John 21 shows a concern for the future mission of the church overall that is uncharacteristic of the rest of the Gospel. Fourth, there seems to be geographical confusion about the disciples' position compared to the previous chapters and a general apathy that makes no sense compared to the celebration and drive to mission found in John 20:19-23. Fifth, if the encounter with Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18) counts as a post-resurrection encounter, then mathematically, John 21:14 does not make sense and should read as the *fourth* time Jesus appeared to the disciples. Finally, John 21:25 forms a literary conclusion that matches other ancient literary sources instead of a theologically inclined ending in the previous chapter.<sup>10</sup>

So then, why was this redaction necessary? One possible theory involves the need for Peter to be painted in a better light. His three-time confession of his love for Jesus overcomes his denial in John 18:15-18 and 25-27.<sup>11</sup> This redaction already demonstrates a growing appreciation within early Christianity for the authority of Peter. However, even this redaction does not overcome the problem of the "Beloved Disciple" within this chapter and other places in John.<sup>12</sup> In John 21:20f, this disciple still holds a higher authority even after Peter is told to be the

---

<sup>10</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, Loc 2128-2135.

<sup>11</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, Loc 2157.

<sup>12</sup> See John 1:35-40, 13:23, 18:15-16, 19:25-27, and 20:2-8.

shepherd of Jesus's people. His questioning pushes the readers to see that ultimate authority lies within the Beloved disciple and his telling of the Jesus story. Peter may shepherd the people, but the Beloved disciple is the one who transmits the Jesus tradition to the Johannine community.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, John gives authority to the Beloved disciple, who makes doctrinal decisions, while Peter serves as pastor, which differs from Matthew's text, which gives more robust evidence of Peter's authority to make doctrinal decisions. Regardless of this distinction, John 21 is a redaction within John that the church receives to justify the power of the pope.

Neither text gives a historical account of the papacy. Instead, later developments in the church receive them as justification for a Papacy already in development. A key point from the above exegesis concerns who can make doctrinal decisions and who ultimately leads the church. While Peter certainly stands out in Matthew and John (not to mention the rest of the New Testament), the Bible cannot be used to reliably track the development of Papal authority because evidence demonstrates the traditionally used texts fall into categories of reception. If these texts were received as justification for Papal authority, the papacy would have developed without these texts as sources.

### *Summary*

This project does not want to deny the importance of reception within the history of Christianity. Indeed, if it were not for a special reception of John, the church would not have come to the Chalcedonian Definition of Christology. On the same token, the reception of Revelation 13 also fuels the anti-vaccination group's tendencies to see vaccines as the Mark of

---

<sup>13</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, Loc 2157-2168.

the Beast.<sup>14</sup> Reception history defined many of the functions of Christianity and built it to its current point. Indeed, the scripture and tradition mentioned above will play a role in the conversation, but they did not *start* the conversation. Rather, these texts get applied to the structures after they come into existence. Instead, I propose looking closer at the church's interactions with "worldly" powers as its source for papal power.

### **Empire and the Laity in the Church**

Rieger writes:

From the very beginning, our images of Jesus Christ have developed in the context of empire. Jesus was born under the rule of the Roman Emperor Augustus, lived under the auspices of the Roman Empire, and was executed by a common means of punishment for political rebels in unruly provinces: the cross. Empire in one form or another has been the context in which some of the most important later images of Christ developed: the notion of Jesus' lordship gained prominence at a time when the Roman emperors would claim to be the only lords...<sup>15</sup>

Christianity has the issue of empire deeply entrenched into its very identity. At the same time, the issue of laity and the church's interaction with them plays a significant factor in its development and how Luther responds to the Roman church. In this section, I hope to explore this relationship's nature further to present the context that Luther will critique. First, I will explore two emperors and their legacies: Constantine and Charlemagne. Next, I will explore the Gregorian reform and how it changed the papacy in terms of its power over the laity. Finally, I will briefly introduce the issue of conciliarism and its development as it leads to the Reformation.

---

<sup>14</sup> Grayvold, "Marks and Tweets," Forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> Rieger, *Christ & Empire*, Loc 77-80.

*Constantine's Legacy*

O'Malley argues that, except for Peter, Constantine was more important for the papacy and Christianity than any pope.<sup>16</sup> Before Constantine, the church had its patterns of dealing with persecution and further development as an interconnected community. Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313, which guaranteed official tolerance of Christians in the empire. He viewed the church as a force of cohesion in the empire.<sup>17</sup> While much could be said about the favors, he bestowed upon the church during his reign, a key factor for this project was when he began to refer to himself as the "common bishop." Because he lauded many favors upon the church, he began to consider himself a "super-bishop," in O'Malley's words, who ensured "order and Orthodoxy in the church, to do what was necessary to enable the church to function and flourish."<sup>18</sup> O'Malley says further:

The term meant that his influence extended over all bishops. Those bishops, including the bishop of Rome, paid him deference, no questions asked. He in turn respected the bishops' authority and realized that they had a sphere properly their own, but he was not above taking the initiative in particular cases. The church began to function within the Roman system but was not absorbed by it.<sup>19</sup>

Despite his perspective that the church was a source of cohesion, he could not stand by when the Arian conflict began in 319-320. His calling and the council set a precedent for the church's functioning. While many major theological decisions were made at this council, Constantine's leadership brought the church into Roman-style governance. The council functioned like the Roman Senate, and Constantine behaved towards the council as a Roman

---

<sup>16</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 29.



emperor would to the Roman Senate.<sup>20</sup> While the bishop of Rome played little influence in this particular era, Constantine, despite triggering a golden era for the church, also begot tension regarding the bishops' partnership with the Roman Emperor. This tension set the tone for future papal encounters with lay rulers.

Throughout the following centuries, the papacy started a long process of discerning what that office meant. The bishop of Rome lost prestige when the capital got moved to Constantinople. For the papacy to continue justifying its primacy, the reception of biblical texts and tradition allowed for a justification to keep that power. However, Constantine also had good relationships, for the most part, with the popes and bishops of the church, who in turn followed him without question. With the emperor now in a far-off place, those relationships dissolved.

With Rome no longer the center of the empire, the city itself suffered. The papacy stepped up to deal with this issue and soon grew to have civil powers for the city's administration. Eventually, the papacy had to seek aid from outsiders to protect lands that had come under papal protection.

<sup>21</sup> Stephan II, in 754, needed help against the Lombards to protect Rome. He crossed the Alps in 754 to meet with Pepin, who had been crowned king through the support of the previous pope.

Stephan II got the support he sought and the granting of the Duchy of Rome as the rightful possession of St. Peter and what would become known as the Papal states. In this single step, the pope became a recognized civic leader with lands in which he served as administrator.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 30. See also Whalen, *The Medieval Papacy*, 24-27; Schimmelpfennig, *The Papacy*, 34-35.

<sup>21</sup> Vaillancourt, *Papal Power*, 24-26. See also O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 57-58. See also Schimmelpfennig, *The Papacy*, 79-81.

Pepin's son, Charlemagne, came to Leo III's side in another set of conflicts due to accusations of papal impropriety. Due to threats on Leo III's life, he called upon Charlemagne to intercede in investigations. Charlemagne obliged, and eventually, Leo III took a solemn oath to purge himself of the charges, which satisfied Charlemagne. Several days later, Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor, and Leo began to act as an agent of Charlemagne rather than an independent bishop.<sup>23</sup> While the end of this particular history leaves the papacy under the regency of Charlemagne, the fact remains that the papacy held lands of its own. It had a recognized responsibility to take care of the people of these lands beyond what would typically be seen as the work of any bishop. This event became essential to the reformers because Luther lived in this empire that stems from this event.

### *Gregorian Reform*

Pope Gregory VII took the papacy in 1073 and became one of the most significant reformers of the church. While he had many reforms, his *Dictatus Papae* is a good starting place to reflect his particular mindset. While many of the lines he wrote in this document stem from claims from previous popes, several lines reveal a direct position regarding the relationship between civil leaders and the pope.

3. That he [the pope] can depose or reinstate bishops.
7. That for him alone is it lawful, according to the needs of the time, to make new laws, to assemble together new congregations, to make an abbey of a canonry; and, on the other hand, to divide a rich bishopric and unite the poor ones.
9. That of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet.
12. That it may be permitted to him to depose emperors.
18. That a sentence passed by him may be retracted by no one; and that he himself, alone of all, may retract it.
19. That he himself may be judged by no one.

---

<sup>23</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 71-72. This list quoted from O'Malley does not contain the full list of this document. For the full list, see Halsall, *Medieval Sourcebook*.

27. That he may absolve subjects from their fealty to wicked men.<sup>24</sup>

Three refers to the regular practice of civil rulers choosing their own bishops, a practice very popular by the said civil rulers. While seven refers to ecclesiastical matters, the pope has a natural right to make new laws for the most part. While this would make sense given the issue of the papal states, this one becomes stronger as other declarations get made. Nine gives the pope primacy over all princes, which seems to be a short declaration compared to twelve. Twelve marks a significant departure from previous relationships with the papacy and emperors. What started as tension between the leaders now confirms the primacy of the pope over the highest of rulers. Eighteen and nineteen confirm that no one can make an exception to the sentence passed by the pope. These statements did not just sit on paper as Gregory VII used them against Henry IV in 1074 by deposing him and releasing his subjects from their oath to their emperor.<sup>25</sup> This ever-growing tension eventually leads to conflict in who holds the papacy, and, as a result, history has instances of multiple people claiming the papacy. In order to resolve this issue of multiple popes, a movement in the church grew to argue for more voices to hold power and accountability over the papal office.

### *Conciliarism*

Conciliarism grows leading up to the Reformation. While not an old issue, the popes continued to be leery of any call of councils. Popes began to raise their armies and administer economies that promoted the protection of Rome and its lands. Since the papacy was the only elected monarchy in Europe, every death led to a national crisis. Nepotism ran rampant in the

---

<sup>24</sup> Halsall, *Medieval Sourcebook*.

<sup>25</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 101-102.

Renaissance era as popes would bribe their way into the election and then raise family members to the office of cardinal, thus potentially keeping the power within families as new popes get elected by their own families. So while the power given to the papacy made the direction of armies and production much more accessible, the process of election to the papacy gave room for corruption. Depending on the pope in the office, the fear of losing their prestige or the ability to protect the papal states played different roles in this fear of conciliarism.<sup>26</sup>

Conciliarism's rise started with the Great Western Schism in the early fifteenth century, which had three popes trying to take hold of the see. Interestingly, as the controversy continued with the multiple popes, church leaders and laity alike agreed that only a general council could solve the issue.<sup>27</sup> Whalen summarizes the dynamics at play:

This emphasis on conciliar authority raised a broader question about the true nature of governance within the church, namely whether ultimate authority resided in a single figure, the pope, or the assembly of churchmen who invested the pope with his position of spiritual leadership. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, canon lawyers commenting on the *Decretum* and the *Decretals* had speculated in legal terms about the relative authority of the pope and general councils to speak in matters of consequences for the entire Church. Canon lawyers, even those sympathetic to a strong form of the papal office, generally conceded that Saint Peter's power to loosen and bind belonged in some respect to all apostles and by extension all bishops. They also postulated a difference between the Roman Church, denoting the entire body of the faithful, and the particular church in Rome. Although the former would not ever fail or err, the latter might, revealing the need for the general council as alternative source of authority in the Church.<sup>28</sup>

In order to settle the situation, the Council of Constance was called in 1414. Several things important to Reformation happened at this council. First of all, leaders of the council

---

<sup>26</sup> O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 172-173.

<sup>27</sup> Whalen, *The Medieval Papacy*, 169-170.

<sup>28</sup> Whalen, *The Medieval Papacy*, 170-171.

promised Jan Hus safe passage to the event, but upon condemning his theology and John Wycliffe's, the council burned Hus at the stake. Second, the council deposed all three popes, which left a lay King in charge of the proceedings until the council elected a new pope. Third, the council declared that a pope was subject to the decision of any council. The decree *Haec sancta* challenged the monarchical papal governance by claiming that the council held power "directly from Christ" and that all, including popes, must abide by it. Finally, provisions were put in place that a council was automatically triggered in the event of a papal schism and for regular councils to happen at various intervals of time.<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In closing this section, I have demonstrated several areas where Luther's opponent derived their arguments for papal authority. The reception of scripture gave credibility to the primacy of the bishop of Rome. Nevertheless, Luther, as I will demonstrate shortly, receives scripture in a different way that runs counter to the particular interpretation of the Roman church. While the Roman church certainly uses scripture in their arguments regarding the papacy, Luther will instead stress the authority of scripture over the papacy. In doing so, he prioritizes his reception of scripture over that of the Roman church. Luther's conception eventually led to the Lutheran conception of scripture as the "norming norm that is not normed" (*norma normans*).<sup>30</sup>

The papacy's interaction with emperors incentivized and structured how different popes viewed themselves next to lay rulers. While with Constantine, the Papacy enjoyed a range of benefits, unresolved authority issues eventually led to conflict over what matters fell into the

---

<sup>29</sup> Whalen, *The Medieval Papacy*, 171-173. See also Schimmelpfennig, *The Papacy*, 224-228.

<sup>30</sup> Persaud, "Theological Non-Negotiables," 10. See also FC 486.1.

papacy's jurisdiction and what fell into the emperor's. In Constantine considering himself a "super-bishop," set the stage for lay leadership within the church, but the papacy still had duties and authority over geographical lands and thus had secular and ecclesiastical power.

Charlemagne also may have humbled the papacy by rescuing Leo III, but Leo III still put the crown on Charlemagne's head. The papacy's relationship with the emperors left many questions over the role of lay rulers and their relationship to the papacy regarding authority. Luther will eventually use this political tension to his advantage by incorporating into his ecclesiology of the priesthood of all believers the responsibilities to carry out one's "work" through their baptism.

When the Gregorian Reform came, the papacy tried to establish itself as a power with authority and sovereignty over secular rulers. In strengthening and centralizing power in the papacy, matters of scriptural interpretation and doctrine became centralized in the papacy. Luther argues that this prevented the papacy from being held responsible for its actions. Luther was not the first to have qualms about this issue, as conciliarism began a pushback against the monarchy of the pope. Conciliarism began a movement that, while focused on the Roman curia as a source of power, also brought lay voices into the conversation regarding the church's governance. In particular, the Council of Constance would play a major role in both affirming Luther in his positions as well as a weapon used against him by his critics. While much more history can account for Luther's response to the sovereignty of the papacy, the context provided by this section will be sufficient in leading into Luther.

## LUTHER'S ROOTS

In presenting Luther's response, I will move through his writings chronologically to demonstrate the development of Luther's perspectives. I am using this methodology because Luther's perspective regarding the papacy changes as he interacts with his opponents. Before the 95 Theses, Luther was relatively unknown, but soon he found himself in the spotlight as admirers and critics read his work. He began defending his theses, hoping that his critics and leaders of the Roman church would debate them with him. Luther even conceded that if he could be proven wrong, he would be willing to recant them. Nevertheless, his *95 Theses* touched on issues that irritated individuals who attacked him for many reasons, both pastoral and personal. This section will focus on how the *95 Theses* started a conflict in the church despite Luther's best intentions. While issues related to justification and penance were the primary concern of Luther, his opponents forced him to take a position on papal primacy that became a fixation of his critics and became central to their argument against him.

### The 95 Theses<sup>1</sup>

In the modern world, viral tweets and memes seem commonplace. These things become viral not solely by the work of their creators but rather by the response of sharing the virtual object. It quickly becomes a snowball effect where one person's sharing on social media influences others to share it. Sometimes this even goes beyond the expectation or even desire of

---

<sup>1</sup> The translation I will reference comes from TAL 1.34f. For more specific information on the translations of *The 95 Theses* see note 17.

the individual. Luther's *95 Theses* fit many definitions of a viral phenomenon thanks to the printing press. Posting them on the door at Wittenburg (a disputed fact) and sharing them in a letter with his archbishop Albrecht of Mainz triggered a massive response that continues to impact today's world.<sup>2</sup>

### *Indulgences and Keys*

While much can be said about the history leading up to *The 95 Theses*, two key points stand out for this project. First, Luther contended with what the office of the keys referenced in Matt 16:19 meant when it came to the issue of indulgences. The sacrament of penance had three parts: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. A person would first feel sorrow for their sins, driving them to confession with a priest. A priest would then provide an absolution and bring the person from sin into a state of grace. Thus the guilt of sin was removed, and punishment for sin moved from eternal to temporal. The final step would be satisfaction or doing good works to satisfy the temporal punishment. Indulgences played a part in satisfaction by allowing people to pay money in honor of Christ or the saints as an act of good work. One form of these indulgences included the plenary indulgence, which offered full remission of all one's temporal punishment. The type of indulgence particular to Luther's concern in *The 95 Theses* is a plenary indulgence connected to Peter to rebuild the Basilica of St. Peter. Ultimately, Luther's concern centered on whether or not the pope's authority included the ability to issue indulgences in this way.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> TAL 1.22-23

<sup>3</sup> TAL 1.14-17. See also Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 130-134; Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, 57; and Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 8-11. For specific papal documents regarding the development of indulgences, see Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 56-57.



Luther's second concern involved the authority given to the indulgence preachers through the pope. As mentioned before, the pope had the power to issue indulgences. He would then give the authority to certain preachers to advertise the product to people. While Luther's concern was primarily pastoral, he also mentioned his concern with how much power these preachers held . Their preaching of indulgences would replace regular preaching, and these indulgence preachers would even encourage regular parish preachers to instead preach on the benefits of buying indulgence. Tetzel, one of the targets of Luther's angst, would also overstep his responsibilities by threatening people who impeded his preaching of indulgences on any grounds. While Luther's concerns started with his concern that Tetzel cheated people out of their money, he also grew increasingly concerned with how much authority Tetzel received to continue his work.<sup>4</sup>

Luther speaks explicitly about papal authority in several of his theses. Thesis five speaks about Luther's concern regarding the papal remittance of penalties not issued by the pope himself. From Luther's perspective, the pope could only remit ecclesiastical penalties and not God's punishment. Luther furthers this contention in thesis six that ecclesiastical penalties, while under the papacy's jurisdiction, were only meant for the most heinous crimes. Thesis twenty also reaffirms both of these positions.<sup>5</sup> In thesis twenty-one through twenty-four, Luther refutes the indulgence preacher's claim that the pope can release a person from all penalties akin to the "get out of jail" card of the game Monopoly. Luther claims that according to canon law, the pope cannot remit a penalty that a person should have paid in life and that such a complete remittance

---

<sup>4</sup> TAL 1.18-21. See also Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 52; Durant, *The Reformation: A History*, 52-53; Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, 58-59; Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 134-136; and Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> TAL 1.35-37 notes 24-25, 33.

of sin could only be given to very few people who had minimal fault worth remitting. Luther then takes a further step and questions the claims regarding the papacy's ability to release souls from purgatory. In theses twenty-five and twenty-six, he claims that the pope's power to remit punishment through the office of the keys is no different from a bishop in a diocese or a parish priest. The office of keys referenced in Matthew 16:9 gives Peter and, by extension, all priests and bishops the ability to forgive sin only while the person is alive. The pope can only *intercede* on behalf of a soul in purgatory.<sup>6</sup>

Theses fifty through fifty-two have Luther either passively admonishing the pope or giving gentle corrective encouragement. This general section of the theses reflects on a positive way to teach about indulgences in the church. In fifty through fifty-two, his argument turns towards the pope, saying that if the pope realized how poorly indulgences were preached, he would rather burn the Basilica of St. Peter and rebuild it with basic materials or pay for it through his own wealth. Rumors of corruption could certainly influence Luther into saying these things, but just as likely, this could be an honest critique with a hopeful outcome. While Luther certainly tends to write emotionally charged rhetoric, his specific motives in these theses are not apparent.<sup>7</sup> However, given the circumstances, a relatively unknown professor openly told a pope what he should do. As the previous section of this project demonstrated, the papacy has a history of not responding kindly to being told what to do.

---

<sup>6</sup> TAL 1.38 note 36.

<sup>7</sup> Luther did not know that underlying Peter's indulgence was also a debt repaying scheme by his own bishop Albrecht. See Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 47-50; Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 65; and TAL 1.17-18. Yet Luther was aware of some issues of avarice in the papacy (see TAL 1.44 note 44). Additionally Durant also notes that Leo X inherited a full papal coffer and spent it recklessly though it did bring about the best of Renaissance Rome (Durant, *The Reformation: A History*, 337).

In the final theses, Luther targets the practices of the papacy and its symbols of power. In thesis seventy-nine, he attacks the assertion that the papal coat of arms erected at the site of indulgence preaching has equal worth to the cross of Christ. Given that the pope saw himself as a sovereign power, an attack on the coat of arms, though legitimate, could have severe repercussions for someone as unknown as Luther.<sup>8</sup> Luther also presents critiques from the laity that question the honor given to the pope. In thesis eighty-two, the laity asks that if the papacy could remove souls from purgatory, why not do it out of generosity instead of building the Basilica through "filthy lucre." Thesis eighty-six echoes concerns from others around Luther who had suspicions about papal wealth.<sup>9</sup>

*What Does This Mean?*

The theses meant several things for Luther. First and foremost, while this event has mythic legends of Luther nailing these theses to the wall, the event was more ordinary than the legends say otherwise. Luther did not originally intend for this debate to involve the congregation of Wittenburg but to stick to ecclesiological and theological debate specifically.<sup>10</sup> Luther also believed that the preaching on indulgences had some correct theology. What bothered him more was specifically preachers like Tetzel, who used the document entitled *Summary Instructions* to preach a false idea of penance, particularly about buying freedom from temporal punishment or for someone in purgatory.<sup>11</sup> Luther, in practice, saw that indulgences

---

<sup>8</sup> Luther was not the first to have this critique. See TAL 1.44 note 58.

<sup>9</sup> TAL 1.44-45 notes 60, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 26-27.

could function in terms of temporal punishment after receiving absolution, much like practices of prayer or fasting could. Luther's frustrations instead focused on indulgences superseding all forms of contrition and even absolution. Interestingly, the Council of Trent eventually agreed with this early Luther in that one does not get justification through one's work but instead through Christ. The redeemed person then participates in this grace through hope and charity.<sup>12</sup> Early Luther would have followed this sentiment, but the early debates instead focused on his points regarding papal authority.

In summary, *The 95 Theses* do not demonstrate a desire for Luther to disregard the pope's authority completely. Instead, he seeks to bring correction to practices specifically related to the practice of indulgences. However, they reveal a growing notion of Luther's unease with papal power. While we can see the foundations of Luther's understanding of justification, we also see him critiquing developments in the church that reach back centuries. In particular, Luther offers an alternative interpretation of Matt 16:19 that differs from the papal understanding. Luther grounds the idea of papal power back into temporal matters, reminding the papacy of its temporal responsibilities to execute ecclesiastical judgment, which does not pertain to the already dead. In this way, Luther seems to support the papacy's sovereignty. However, divorcing the papacy from alleged powers regarding purgatory undermined the full understanding of the popes. For the papacy, its power came not just from their earthly rulership but also from an understanding that they were the top Christian leader. The East and West Schism demonstrated this issue. This leadership within the church supported the papacy's sovereign rule in temporal

---

<sup>12</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened*, 113-115.

matters. Thus, when Luther undermined the papacy's ecclesiological sovereignty, he also undermined its temporal sovereignty.

### **The Proceedings at Augsburg<sup>13</sup>**

After releasing his *95 Theses*, Luther wrote an explanation of his theses and other documents and sermons involving his disgruntlement with indulgences. While *The 95 Theses* undermined papal authority, Luther still had some hope for reconciliation. As his works went viral, he began to get followers around Germany, and eventually, Rome took notice. Luther's trial was originally set to happen in Rome, but his Elector Frederick interceded on his behalf and set the hearing in Augsburg. The pope selected Cardinal Cajetan to preside over the hearing. The charges included two specific issues with his theses: one with thesis fifty-eight and his explanation of thesis seven. Thesis seven relates more to penance, while thesis fifty-eight explicitly discusses papal authority.

#### *A Cardinal and a Monk*

Thesis fifty-eight reads, "N[or] are they the merits of Christ and the saints because even without the pope, these merits always work grace for the inner person and cross, death, and hell for the outer person."<sup>14</sup> Wengert explains, "Luther points out that by attaching another's merit to indulgences, they cease being truly an indulgence of the church but only another way of paying the same penalty, and that such merits work death and life without papal indulgences."<sup>15</sup> Luther's

---

<sup>13</sup> For the translation I will reference of Luther's account of the proceedings, see TAL 1.128 note 13. Hequet also includes a translation of *The "Extravagante" of Clement VI (Unigenitus Dei Filius)*, which plays a major role for Cajetan's position. See TAL 1.127 note i for information regarding the translation I will use.

<sup>14</sup> See TAL 1.42

<sup>15</sup> TAL 1.42 note 52.

explanation of his thesis rejects the idea of a treasury of merits left by the saints. He argues that the saints certainly could not have a superabundance of merit since they do err. Second, they would be the saint's rewards if they had such merits. Finally, Christ's merit supersedes that of the saints.<sup>16</sup> Using scripture, the church fathers, and even the pope, he demonstrates this stance regarding the treasury of indulgences held by the church.

Cajetan, however, used the *Unigentius Dei Filius* to support papal authority. The text gives the designation of Christ's merits into a treasury held in safekeeping by the pope as the successor to Peter via the office of the keys in Matt 16:19. *Unigentius Dei Filius* also states that the saints continue to add to this treasury via their merits. However, Christ's merits are infinite; thus, this treasury is never depleted.<sup>17</sup> As anyone can see, Luther's thesis and *Unigentius Dei Filius* directly counter one another. This tension thus sets the tone for the meeting between Luther and Cajetan. For his part, Cajetan supported the idea of papal primacy. Because *Unigentius Dei Filius* clearly states its position, Cajetan used it to support his argument for papal primacy in doctrine. Luther, however, approached this interrogation regarding support from scripture, the church fathers, and reason.<sup>18</sup> At this very point in history, Luther, intellectually at least, left the Roman church.

#### *Afterthoughts about the Meeting*

Going to Luther's account itself, after being demanded to recant his views and Cajetan's criticism of Luther's explanation of thesis seven, Luther describes how Cajetan justified his

---

<sup>16</sup> LW 31:212-228.

<sup>17</sup> See TAL 1.127-128.

<sup>18</sup> TAL 1.124. See also Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 84-85; Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, 74-75; and Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 160.

critique via the *Unigentius Dei Filius*. Luther describes the situation as if Cajetan and his companions were leading Luther into a trap, but he replied that he had read that document and one from Sixtus IV.<sup>19</sup> He writes

For many reasons, the *Extravagante [Unigentius Dei Filius]* did not impress me as being truthful or authoritative, especially because it distorts the Holy Scriptures and audaciously twists the words (if indeed their customary meaning still should be accepted) into a meaning which they do not have in their context; in fact, they have a contrary meaning. The Scriptures, which I follow in my Thesis 7, are to be preferred to the bull in every case. Nothing is proven in the bull. Only the teaching of St. Thomas is trotted out and reiterated.<sup>20</sup>

Luther says that after giving his response related to these sentiments, Cajetan began a lengthy speech extolling the primacy of the pope over scripture, the councils, and the entire church. This response surprised Luther; he found this articulation new, disagreed, and denied the pope's superiority.<sup>21</sup>

From Luther's perspective, Cajetan seemed fixated on this issue of papal superiority. The argument spilled into the next few days, and Luther was allowed to make a written statement in which he asserted his position against Cajetan. Luther begins by saying he had read *Unigentius Dei Filius* before writing the *95 Theses*. He then first counters by stating his frustration that a pope could write such scandalous text that avoids the consensus of the church in that God's grace could not be dispensed through human beings. Luther also found it odd that the pope would twist scripture in such a way to prove a point. Next, he argues that the papacy can err, and even Peter was reprimanded at different times. Furthermore, Luther points out how often new papal

---

<sup>19</sup> TAL 1.131-132.

<sup>20</sup> TAL 1.132. See also note 31 and o for texts giving Cajetan's own perspective of the situation.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

documents correct previous documents. Finally, he argues that *Unigentius Dei Filius* makes multiple false statements, one of which he argues regarding the saints contributing to the treasury of grace.<sup>22</sup>

Luther then tries to bring his thesis into an agreement with *Unigentius Dei Filius*. However, to do this, he argues for several significant points that undermine papal authority. First, he argues that indulgences do not exist in the metaphysical sense because they contribute a negative good (i.e., the remission of sins); thus, nothing is given out of any treasury. Second, the pope does not have access to such a treasure chest where he can withdraw something, and instead, this statement reflects the office of the keys, which does not open any chest, but instead makes his will known and thus grants the indulgence. If this second point is valid, he then thirdly argues that these merits are from Christ because the office of the keys was given by Christ for satisfaction to be remitted. Thus, the treasure given to Peter and his successors in Matt 16:19 are only given figuratively and shared with the whole church.<sup>23</sup> Luther continues to make several other points, but these represent his conclusions regarding papal power.

### *Consequences of a Bad Fight*

The proceedings ended after several days, with neither individual reaching a consensus.<sup>24</sup> Luther appealed first to the pope to be heard and then appealed for a council to come together and hear his case.<sup>25</sup> This final appeal for a council marks the culmination of this entire event.

---

<sup>22</sup> TAL 1.134-138.

<sup>23</sup> TAL 1.138-139.

<sup>24</sup> Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, 74. See also Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 164; Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 86.



Luther gets blindsided by an individual whose entire argument focuses on papal superiority over all matters of doctrine. While Luther himself came ready for a debate and discussion, he was instead pushed to recant without that debate in favor of a papal document, which Luther not only argued had no authority but also was filled with errors. While the issue of justification played through much of Luther's arguments, Cajetan's argument focused on how Luther's point undermined the pope and his authority. In many ways, Luther's arguments did indeed do just that, but Luther hoped that when people saw his position, he could convince people of his central point regarding indulgences and penance. The Roman Church held its position even through the Council of Trent when it made no official decree concerning papal reform.<sup>26</sup> Luther's perspectives could not be reconciled with the idea of papal primacy, and this grows even stronger in his conversations with Eck.

### **Luther in Leipzig**

This final part of Luther's roots will not deal with a single writing of Luther's, but rather a transition that happens in Luther's public thoughts after Augsburg. Up to Augsburg, Luther hoped he could debate his theses, and his opponents would come to a consensus with him. He also saw the bad practices in the church as the fault of bad preachers and bishops and not necessarily a systematic problem. Augsburg changed Luther. While he already had some misgivings regarding the church hierarchy, he now witnessed the church hierarchy acting against him. While this event did not shatter his perspective regarding the Roman church, he certainly began transitioning from ambivalence regarding the papacy to considering the papacy as an affront to scripture.

---

<sup>26</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened*, 19.

*Sensing an Apocalypse*

After Augsburg, Luther revealed in his private contacts that he suspected the Antichrist might be working among the Roman Curia. Luther met with Miltitz at Altenburg, and Miltitz attempted to find common ground and possibly repair the relationship between Luther and Rome. Luther proposed drafting a letter that did not recant anything regarding his theses. However, it still affirmed the supremacy of the Roman church, and it did not critique Leo X regarding the presence of wayward preachers. Scholars question Luther's sincerity since Luther's position against the papacy had grown more assertive in private. As Luther prepared for Leipzig, he studied papal decrees, which drove him further until he confidentially told Spalatin that he did not know if the pope was the Antichrist or his apostle. What drove Luther was the question of scripture and its precedence regarding the papacy. He found many examples in the papal decrees that ran counter to his reception of scripture.<sup>27</sup> Luther had already concluded the superiority of scripture over the papacy, but now he found his views on scripture led to negative conclusions regarding the papacy.

One particular instance of this scriptural influence comes from Romans 1:17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'" In reflecting later on this text, Luther explains that he switched from seeing the text in terms of a righteous God who hands out punishments.<sup>28</sup> He explains, "This is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'He who through

---

<sup>27</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 75-76. See also Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 97.

<sup>28</sup> Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 96.

faith is righteous shall live.”<sup>29</sup> This conviction became central to his life and drove his arguments against his opponents.<sup>30</sup> The tyrannical God Luther perceived earlier in his life now becomes the merciful God who justifies through faith. While this has implications for how Luther would pursue justification, it also has another aspect regarding papal sovereignty. Here, the Gospel becomes the superseding factor in Luther’s hierarchy of faith. Revelation through scripture supersedes all factors in the institutional church: its traditions, its councils, its leaders, and even its popes. This private perspective became public in Leipzig.

### *Eck Versus Luther*

Luther’s reflections reveal that he suspected his enemies would pursue the papal primacy question even before the debate, and thus he did not want to do it.<sup>31</sup> When it came to Luther’s turn to debate Eck, Eck began by saying that the pope’s primacy rested in Matthew 16:18-19, John 21:17, 22, and Luke 22:32 as well as the church fathers. He then concluded that the matter was settled at the Council of Constance, where Huss was burned at the stake for arguing that papal power was derived from the emperor, not Christ.<sup>32</sup> In Luther’s reflections, he says:

In rebuttal I brought up the Greek Christians during the past thousand years, and also the ancient church fathers, who had not been under the authority of the Roman pontiff, although I did not deny the primary of honor due the pope. Finally we also debated the authority of a council. I publicly acknowledged that some articles had been wrongly condemned [by the Council of Constance], articles which had been taught in plain and clear words by Paul, Augustine, and even Christ himself. At this point the adder swelled up, exaggerated my crime, and nearly went insane in his adulation of the Leipzig audience. Then I proved by the words of the council itself that not

---

<sup>29</sup> LW 34:336-38.

<sup>30</sup> Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 97.

<sup>31</sup> LW 31:320.

<sup>32</sup> LW 31:321. See also notes 22 and 23.

all the articles which it condemned were actually heretical and erroneous. So Eck's proofs had accomplished nothing. There the matter rested.<sup>33</sup>

A common consensus agrees that the debate was a disaster. Eck made Luther confess his perspective of papal authority being derived from human sources by agreeing with Hus and Wycliff and saying they are "most Christian and evangelical." While Eck was trying to play politics given the context of Leipzig, Luther now had confirmed his position against papal primacy to the public.<sup>34</sup>

This argument runs so deep for Luther that it presents him with a new position on ecclesiology. Hendrix demonstrates Luther's argument "that an exclusive monarchy of the pope robbed Christ of his status as the invisible head of the earthly church...The church is a kingdom of faith, said Luther, where we do not see our head; but we have him present on the thrones of judgment (Psalm 122:5) as the invisible king behind every prelate who occupies a see of the church."<sup>35</sup> For Luther, he saw the papacy as an affront to Christ that impeded every Christian from encountering God. This idea meant that the Roman church could not be the only gateway to Christ, but anyone could access Christ through faith. To put this more broadly, Luther condemned not just the papacy but anyone who seeks to be a gatekeeper because they rob Christ of his authority.

---

<sup>33</sup> LW 31:322. Luther's interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19 states the church was built on the *faith* of Peter (Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, 80.)

<sup>34</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 87. See also Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 86-89; Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 174-179; and Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 102-103.

<sup>35</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 86-87.

## Conclusions

Post-Leipzig, Luther had appealed to the pope and even called for a council to present his theology for analysis.<sup>36</sup> What began with ninety-five academic arguments became a fracture within the church. Luther never intended for his work to create a schism. Instead, he viewed the church as his home and wanted to approach the topic on an academic level. Since he was a professor, this process seemed incredibly reasonable to him, and he even argued early in the debate that he would recant if someone could convince him otherwise. Instead, Luther's critiques called for him to recant without consideration of his theological points because they disagreed with established precedence from the papacy. Because this factor drove the conversation, Luther went from being slightly ambivalent about papal power unless it infringed on the church's pastoral work to seeing the papacy as an affront to Christ. Luther began to see the pope as a gatekeeper that prevented access to Christ to anyone deemed "unworthy." For this project, the idea of anyone, pope or layperson, being a gatekeeper to Christ is an interesting point of analysis regarding Christian nationalism. More will be said at the end about this point, but next, I will move on to the post-Leipzig era of Luther's life.

---

<sup>36</sup> Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*; 93. See also Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 163-164.

## WAR WITH ROME

Post-Leipzig, Luther became increasingly agitated with the idea of papal power and sovereignty. During this time, he read Valla's refutation of the *Donation of Constantine*. This text angered him to the point where in private correspondence, he moved from the position of the pope being a disciple of the Antichrist to being the Antichrist himself. He became increasingly adamant about this perspective and began using language such as "Romanist" and "Papist" to describe his enemies in Rome.<sup>1</sup> As such, he gave up plans of reform within the church and called on outside forces to aid his fight against the papacy. In this section, I will first analyze Luther's ecclesiology and how it empowered the lay rulers of Luther's time to respond to papal sovereignty. Finally, I will explore Luther's response to his excommunication in his reasoning to burn the writings of the papacy and its supporters.

### Practical Applications of Luther's Ecclesiology<sup>2</sup>

Luther began not only writing in Latin but also German as he began a new era of polemics against the papacy. In *Address to the Christian Nobility*, he addresses the German nobility and bids for their aid in the latter. The document represents an application of Luther's ecclesiology in world politics while simultaneously pulling at the patriotic heartstrings of his German rulers. A short time after he presents this document, movement within the Vatican by

---

<sup>1</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 99-102.

<sup>2</sup> Notes regarding the particular translation of *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Improvement of the Christian Estate, 1520* that I will refer to can be found in TAL 1.376 note 3.

Eck finally gets the papacy to call for Luther's excommunication. In response, Luther decided to burn the books of the papacy and canon law and then wrote a document explaining why he did so. The transition from distrust of papal power to outright condemnation and hatred marks a jump in his polemic writings.

### *The Ecclesiology of Luther*

Luther does call for conditional obedience to the papacy prior to his excommunication. He gave two conditions for his tolerance. First, the pope must not make any new articles of faith and stop branding Christians outside of the pope's power as heretics. Second, he will obey the pope's commands as long as those commands are faithful to scripture.<sup>3</sup> Luther further argued that two churches exist in the world. One that was external and visible with the pope at its head and the other "spiritual, inner Christendom" that had only acknowledged Christ as its head.<sup>4</sup> Marius summarizes Luther's ecclesiology as such:

His [Luther's] main point was that the true church was not an institution, but a communion embracing all who confessed Christ; it was not centered in Rome but rather was present wherever faith lives in the human heart. Luther's consistent theme was that the church was a hidden communion, and one by one he attacked other definitions that emphasize institutional visibility. The church could have no earthly head, neither bishop nor pope; over the church ruled Christ alone. The only visible signs of the church were baptism, the Eucharist, and the preaching of the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

Luther would now apply this ecclesiology to Germany's geographical and political landscape.

Before I move on to the *Address*, a couple of historical biases for Luther should be noted.

Within the text, Luther lists many major denouncements that matched lists of grievances of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 103-104. See also Estes TAL 1.369-370 and Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 236-238.

<sup>4</sup> Kittelson and Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer*, 110.

<sup>5</sup> Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 235.

German people against Rome that appeared at every imperial diet since the middle of the fifteenth century. The grievances contained issues that demonstrated the intrusion of papal power overriding the powers of secular rulers. In this action, “Luther identified himself with the conciliarist, patriotically German, anti-Roman sentiment that pervaded German ecclesiastical and political life at the time.”<sup>6</sup> The text redefines the relationship between clergy and laity while giving his perspective on secular government participation in the church’s reform.<sup>7</sup> In this text, Luther calls upon the princes to act as “emergency bishops” to take action against the papacy.<sup>8</sup>

### *Calling Upon the Laity*

Luther starts his *Address* by explaining a three-wall argument in which the papacy protects itself. His opponent’s first tactic involved claiming that secular authorities had no jurisdiction over them, but spiritual authority was above secular authority. Luther’s counter to this argument was that all Christians, through baptism, were consecrated priests.<sup>9</sup> He uses ordination as an example of how this works:

To put it still more clearly: suppose a group of earnest Christian laypeople were taken prisoner and set down in a desert without an episcopally ordained priest among them. And supposed they were to come to a common mind there and then in the desert and elect one of their number, whether he were married or not, and charge him to baptize, say Mass, pronounce absolution, and preach the gospel. Such a man would be as truly a priest as if he had been ordained by all the

---

<sup>6</sup> TAL 1.371. See also Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 105-106; Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer; The Life*, 97-97; Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 234-235.

<sup>7</sup> TAL 1.372.

<sup>8</sup> Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 98.

<sup>9</sup> TAL 1.382.



bishops and popes in the world. This is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution.<sup>10</sup>

Luther's ecclesiology presents itself in this statement. Luther does not necessarily call upon the nobles to act as princes to overcome the issues of the papacy. Instead, he calls upon them to act because they are baptized Christians whose standing in the church gives them the right and authority to deal with the situation at hand. Using their baptized identity, these princes should act in their princely duty to deal with the issues of the papacy. For Luther, the hierarchy of Christian spirituality does not exist, but rather "all are priests, bishops, and popes" who are charged with different work.<sup>11</sup> Those who are "spiritual" priests, bishops, and popes" are tasked with the administration of God's word and the sacraments. Nobility and leaders should act out of their own work to bring justice and peace; Christian leaders should be subject to them and their authority.<sup>12</sup>

We must take a moment to acknowledge how important this perspective becomes regarding this project. In Luther's argument, a Christian's work is not limited to those ordained or consecrated within the church. *All baptized Christians* are responsible for carrying out the church's priesthood in their work. This priesthood also comes with its parameters because this priestly work involves being formed by the Gospel. A Christian's work should reflect the Gospel, which also means being mindful of other Christians' work. The papacy denied that the work of secular governments was just as crucial for Christianity as any church worker. However, this

---

<sup>10</sup> TAL 1.382. It should be noted as well that the term used for "married" could also mean of legitimate birth. This phrasing also acknowledges that an illegitimate birth disqualified a candidate for ordination in the Roman Church (TAL 1.382 note z).

<sup>11</sup> TAL 1.383-384.

<sup>12</sup> TAL 1.384-385

perspective has its issues that even Luther fails to see later in his life, but more will come on in a later section.

The second wall involves Luther's critics arguing that the papacy was the only one that could interpret scripture. First of all, he disproves several uses of scripture by his opponents. Luther denies that this ability has anything to do with the Office of the Keys, as his opponent alleges about Matthew 16:19. The office was granted to the whole church in Matthew 18:18, and the Office of the Keys has to do with the binding and loosening sin, not some governmental authority. He also denies that Luke 22:32 can be applied to the pope because he sees that most popes have no faith, and it is not just for Peter that Christ prays but the whole church, as with John 17:9, 20. Beyond scripture, he continues his argument concerning the priesthood of believers. Luther argues that if we take the priesthood of believers seriously, this would mean that among the laity are good and faithful people who can indeed interpret scripture in good and faithful ways. While again Luther falls into his own receptionist views just as much as the Roman church to back up his perspective, his point also argues from the Nicene Creed's perspective in that Christians believe in one holy Christian church. Everyone who makes up the church plays a role in it.<sup>13</sup>

Without getting into the issues of hermeneutics in academia, this perspective has interesting implications for the freedom of interpretation. In this instance, Luther advocates not for the echo chambers of interpretation but that scriptural interpretation must be open and done within the full body of Christ. In approaching scripture for the Christian life, interpretation should be open to various perspectives and done with a communal mindset. Luther does not say

---

<sup>13</sup> TAL 1.387-389

that any individual's perspective should precede another's, but quite the opposite. While speaking from my personal experience, not everyone has the skills or competency to interpret scripture in helpful ways. In response, I would remind my readers of Luther's argument regarding the first wall and the job of "spiritual" priests, bishops, and popes. Those whose job is to administer God's word and the sacraments have a responsibility also to teach and help their congregation have a better grasp of scripture.

This sentiment also falls into Luther's argument for the third wall that Luther's critics use to protect papal power. When critics of the papacy call for a council to hold the papacy accountable and reform it, the pro-papal contingency argues that only the pope can call a council. Luther points to scriptural evidence such as Acts 15:1-21 where Peter does not call a council but the apostles and some elders. Luther then points to the Council of Nicaea called by Constantine and the others called by emperors saying that if only the pope can call a council, then these previous councils should be heretical. From Luther's perspective, the laity, particularly its rulers, can hold people accountable and deal out punishment for offenses that cause harm to society. In the church, Luther only argues that the church can only foster improvement.<sup>14</sup> To put this into modern terms: the church cannot and should not punish a murderer for his crimes. That is the responsibility of the rulers or leaders. The church, however, can aid in rehabilitating the murderer in terms of penance and guidance. Again, this falls into Luther's ecclesiology, that the body of Christ consists of many members who have many different jobs.

His argument against the third wall sets an entirely different dynamic for Lutherans and other traditions stemming from the Reformation. While the idea of a governmental body calling

---

<sup>14</sup> TAL 1.391.

a synod council would not happen, at least in theory within the US, many traditions reformed from the Roman church emphasize laity participation within their governing bodies. For example: in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the *Constitution for Synods* requires *at least* 60 percent of the delegates to a synod assembly to be laity.<sup>15</sup> While Luther focuses on the papacy within his text, his argument has implications regarding the ruling of a minority elite within the church itself. Given the diversity of Christian polities and practices within the US in the twenty-first century, this argument can apply to one particular group of Christians dominating the politics of any given country.

To summarize up to this point, while Luther has not quite gotten to his “Two Kingdoms” motif in his *Address*, he has set the tone for an ecclesiology that directly pushes back the papacy and its powers. While the rest of the *Address* focuses on specific monetary concerns, such as withdrawing tithes and funding to the Roman church, the application of Luther’s ecclesiology to the political systems of the 1520s gives even the modern Christian some valuable tools. Luther ties the work of a person to their baptism. Because of this baptism, the laity became a part of the priesthood of God in which they had full rights to interpret scripture and to gain insight into their faith apart from the hierarchy of the Roman church. Because of this priesthood of all believers, the laity gets included in the calling of councils where matters of faith can be discussed and provide accountability to those whose work involves administering God’s word and the sacraments. However, the *Address* begins a new heightened and explicit growth in Luther’s hyperbole, revealing a deep hatred for the papal office.

---

<sup>15</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Constitution for Synods*, §7.21.

Before I move on to Luther's hatred, I want to give some background regarding the varied perspectives of the Roman church. After his *Address*, his critics became even more intense in their attacks. If one only reads Luther, one may get the sense that all of Luther's critics believed in the absolute power of the pope. This idea was not the case, not even for Eck. The Roman Curia itself had a range of positive perceptions towards conciliarism. Though Eck's perspectives continued to grow towards papal primacy, he knew that keeping allies among the Roman Curia would be more beneficial to his position. As a result, Eck did focus on Luther's perspectives regarding penance and indulgences. Despite these various perspectives regarding Luther, the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* condemns Luther as one who threatens the livelihood of the church and that his goal is the usurpation of the authority of the church and papacy. If Augsburg and Leipzig represent Luther's intellectual departure from the church, his response to *Exsurge Domine* represents his psychological and spiritual departure from the Roman church.<sup>16</sup>

### **Fire and Anger**

Luther's response to the bull involved a book burning and writing a text on why he did the act. Luther's hatred takes an explicit form by calling the papacy "the Antichrist" in more explicit terms within *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples were Burned*. This issue begs the question of why I will use it in this project. Throughout history, certain entities, such as Nazi Germany, have used certain texts of Luther to justify their horrific actions. Indeed, Luther's language regarding the papacy caused strife in ecumenical talks between the Roman church and Lutherans.

---

<sup>16</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 108-109. See also Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 114-116.

Nevertheless, I argue that this text still offers helpful discussions regarding the intersection of politics and the church. While Luther's context is vastly different from the modern era, the issue of church influence on politics still plays a role in the modern world, particularly when discussing topics like Christian nationalism. While book burning as a practice is problematic and even abhorrent, a key point comes through Luther's reasoning for burning his books: Luther's vision of the church now had a distinctly lay character to it. Luther's idea of the "faithful remnant" included a history of the church in which *all* people, laity and church leaders alike, shared a role and responsibility in carrying out the Gospel.<sup>17</sup>

### *Luther's Rage*

His first nine articles involve holding the papacy responsible for its actions. From Luther's perspective, the papacy had overridden councils and decrees and the full power of the laws of the land without the ability for anyone to hold it accountable. His tenth article summarizes the first nine by arguing that the papacy sees itself as the judge over all others yet cannot be judged by anyone.<sup>18</sup> He further argues:

In the same way St. Paul chastises St. Peter, Gal. 2 [:11-21], that his actions are not in accord with the gospel. And in Acts 8[:14] St. Peter was sent out with St. John by the other apostles as a subordinate. Therefore it is not and can not be true that the pope is subject to or to be judged by no one, but he shall be subject to and judged by every man, inasmuch as he wishes to be supreme. And the canon law, because this is its foundation and whole essence, contends in all its parts against the gospel. It is indeed true that the secular power shall not be subject to its inferiors, but Christ reverses and changes that order saying: "You shall not be as the secular overlords" [Cf. Luke 22:25-26]. And he desires that the leaders of his people should be subject to every man and should allow judgment from them. As he says in Luke 22[25-26], "The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you

---

<sup>17</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 118-119. See also Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 116-117; Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian*, 270-274.

<sup>18</sup> LW 31:385-387.

become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.” How can he be beneath anyone if he does not want to let anyone judge him?<sup>19</sup>

Luther sets his first point by condemning a centralized power within the church. Luther then counters the Roman position regarding Matthew 16:17-19 saying that the Keys were not just given to Peter but the whole church and that Christ alone is the rock on which it is built. Once again, he also asserts that binding and loosening have nothing to do with making laws but rather with forgiving sins.<sup>20</sup> These perspectives represent the ecclesiological tyranny that Luther saw with the pope.

He then transitions into issues of sovereignty outside of the church. Luther first rejects the *Donation of Constantine* and that the pope is the heir to the Roman empire. He further condemns the papacy’s ability to depose kings and dissolve all oaths, alliances, and obligations between higher and lesser estates and any vows a person makes. He further accuses the papacy of making laws equal to the gospels and scripture and monopolizes the interpretation of scripture. This whole section gets summarized in his thirtieth and final point: “The pope does not derive authentic existence, strength, and dignity from Scripture, but Scripture from him.”<sup>21</sup> He concludes that the pope acts as “the Antichrist” because of all the corruption in the church. What becomes important then for this project is the problematic nature of ecclesiological leaders interfering with political powers. Luther’s views of the laity as co-theologians and priests in the church led him to side with secular leaders against the pope's interference. While he does fall

---

<sup>19</sup> LW 31:387.

<sup>20</sup> LW 31:387-388.

<sup>21</sup> LW 31:388-392.

into the issue of hyperbole, the fact remains that many of the accusations Luther lodges at the papacy are indeed things grounded in history, as my section on papal history explains.

### **Conclusion**

In drawing this era to a close, a couple of things become very important that impact this project. Luther's ecclesiology creates a new vision of the church that directly contradicts the structures of the Roman church. In Luther's vision, the laity gains significant power to learn, grow, and make decisions concerning their faith. The laity gets drawn into Luther's visions of a church that goes beyond its hierarchy and promotes a "priesthood of all believers" that shares in the church's work. This new vision also allows the "spiritual" church leaders to be held accountable, a thought process that still has tension even in traditions stemming from the Reformation.<sup>22</sup> While none of this denies that the Roman church still saw the laity as a part of the church, the difference in Luther's ecclesiology is that Luther's church relies on the laity to actually function. The "spiritual" leaders of the church have a job to do in administering God's word and sacrament, but the laity is also called upon to help keep these leaders accountable in the face of corruption that drove Luther down this path from the issues of indulgences. The story of Luther's eventual condemnation and excommunication at the Diet of Worms made the final physical break away from the Roman church, but it also began a new set of issues for Luther as his supporters began to revolt against the Roman church. Some of these allies soon became enemies, not just because he went too far in his thinking, but in some cases, not far enough.

---

<sup>22</sup> In 2022 the Southern Baptist Convention had a third party investigation that revealed the hiding of church leaders who sexually abused their leaders without repercussions and were allowed continue working the church. See Bailey, "Southern Baptist Leaders."



## **ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED**

The last years of Luther's life marked an increase in his use of vulgar, scatological language in his writings. It becomes difficult to see what use these late-life texts have for this project. Addressing Christian nationalism through Luther's critique of papal sovereignty involves his ecclesiological model, where the inclusive nature of the Gospel emphasizes the priesthood of all believers within the church. Much of these writings later in his life develop a polemic that hides anything useful. In many ways, a lot of what Luther says in these vulgar, polemic writings has better examples from earlier in his life. Instead, I propose using these writings as examples of what "not-to-do" in addressing issues in the church. In taking this approach, I hope to demonstrate the similarities between the Late Luther and Christian nationalism. In this section, I will first analyze the underlying factors of Late Luther's violent tendencies within his writings and how those factors impact fruitful conversations surrounding Luther's theology. I will then use one of his "less" polemic writings, *the Smalcald Articles*, and compare his approach to the papacy with the document that the Smalcald League actually used in their debate with the Roman church: *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* by Melanchthon.

### **Issues of Politics and Apocalypse**

The power of hatred breaks the bonds of society. Christian nationalism as an ideology thrives on hatred and fear. The hazards of using Luther to critique it comes with baggage, particularly with the writings at the end of his life. However, this does not deny that Luther

suddenly took on a vulgar nature, but rather it took on new tones. He had already admitted in mid-1522 that he would not give restraint in his writings, arguing that if someone took him seriously, they would not mind his scolding. However, he misjudged how his vivid writing would offend his contemporaries and modern readers. The accusations of hatred driving his polemic even have some critics arguing that it discredits his whole battle with the papacy.<sup>1</sup> How does one approach this era, and what understanding should one have in reading the late Luther?

### *Analyzing the Rage*

Hendrix argues that one cannot separate the passion of Luther from his theology.

Luther considered his polemic to be an appropriate vehicle of his indictment of the papacy. That appropriateness was grounded not so much in Luther's passion as in his purpose. This purpose was to make as vivid as possible the sabotage of the church by papal tyranny. Protesting against the compulsory laws and practices introduced under the papacy, Luther was reminded of a picture of the Last Judgement in which hell was portrayed as the gaping jaws of a dragon devouring both secular and ecclesiastical magnates, among them the pope...Luther regarded it as a useful way of introducing the unlearned to the threat posed by the papal church. Right away they could arm themselves against it.<sup>2</sup>

Hendrix argues that Luther's intentions were always, in the words of Melanchthon, to "exercise the duty of a good pastor." Luther saw the Roman church underneath the papacy as a problematic mess that caused more harm to people's spiritual lives than any good. Whether Luther accomplished this goal or went too far in his writings remains good theological debates. For Hendrix, however, the historical reality after Luther's death did manifest some of his fears. Protestantism almost died. Compromises were made that Luther would abhor. Many practices he

---

<sup>1</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

critiqued continued to be practiced up to and past his death, such as indulgences.<sup>3</sup> Thus for Hendrix, putting Luther in his context surrounding the issues of the papacy, Luther's passion was warranted because it got his point across enough to help prepare the needs of the people Luther cared for pastorally.

This passion, however, still poses an issue in the modern context. One only needs to see the speeches of Donald Trump to realize how passionate speech can be a catalyst for violent actions. Fear creates anger in the first place, and in Hendrix's argument, Luther seems driven by fear for the livelihood of his followers. Indeed, that fear can lead to healthy actions: I can fear for my son's safety and take actions to help him explore his world safely without having to resort to restricting his independence. Luther's passion became a restrictive force that prevented his work from going further. Instead, it inspired other "passionate" ideologies that took people's fears and manipulated them to break societal bonds, such as with Nazi Germany.

Hillerbrand's introduction to *The Jews and their Lies* offers insight into possible issues underlying Luther's late life. This notorious text represents the culmination of antisemitism not only from an ecclesiological perspective but also from a political and cultural standpoint. The drive of Luther's argument is antisemitism. Nevertheless, how he formulates his argument matches a particular tendency in his other polemic writings. The reason why the title has the clause "their lies" centers around Luther's inability to see beyond his own perspectives. Indeed, taking a Christological perspective of the Hebrew Bible would be rejected by any Jewish person, but Luther's drive to prove his Jewish critics wrong reveals a stubbornness to acknowledge any

---

<sup>3</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 155-159.

interpretation outside his own.<sup>4</sup> This perspective stands in strong contrast to Luther's earlier eagerness for more people to have access to scripture, and it became an issue as other Protestants came to different, though still scripturally based, perspectives that departed from Luther. Similarly, Luther has this same issue when writing against the Roman church from such an emotional standpoint, and often enough, he accuses Roman officials of their inability to interpret scripture correctly.<sup>5</sup>

However, just as this point is not Hillerbrand's entire argument, this explanation does not fully explain Luther's polemic approach to the papacy. While Luther often says he will stop writing about something, he rarely follows through on the promise.<sup>6</sup> The issue of the papacy played a significant role in the development of Luther's theology. It began when his early opponents targeted his *95 Theses* regarding the questioning of papal authority, and it remained through his trial and excommunication. This practice demonstrates more that the issue of the papacy was essential to Luther's theology, and while frustration may play a factor in the passion, the centrality of the topic itself plays a more decisive factor than Luther's critics disagreeing with him.

Edwards offers another perspective:

I freely concede that Luther's health, world-view, apocalyptic expectations, and fears for the Reformation movement after his own demise are all significant for an understanding of his later polemics. But I would add that the external circumstances and challenges that he and his movement face in these later years may be even more significant for an understanding of Luther's polemics.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> TAL 5.445, 459.

<sup>5</sup> As an example from this era, see LW 41:285-286.

<sup>6</sup> TAL 5.441-442.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, "Luther's Last Battles," 133.

The shift from a war of ideology with the Roman church to a movement run by rulers of territories and city-states came with a significant change in dynamics for Luther. This transition needed to happen for the Reformation to survive, but it meant a different battle altogether. Instead of fighting with belief and individual effort, new systems of institutions and bureaucracy needed to be created for the new entities to function outside of the standards set by the Roman church. This meant that people needed “to compromise, to accommodate belief to political necessity, to take sides publicly in disputes where no great principles were at stake, and where ideological conviction found itself in league with political self-interest.”<sup>8</sup> Luther sometimes wrote his polemic writings at the bequest of his elector.<sup>9</sup> However, Edwards even concedes that this explanation has limitations because Luther wrote things against his elector's demands.<sup>10</sup>

All of these explanations have some validity and certainly play a role in Luther's polemic. However, nobody mentions the idea of hope for Luther. Early in his career, Luther had a distinct hope that things could change. Edwards argues that Luther had a lifelong vision of the world in which history is a constant war of false prophets versus the one true church. If this were true, why was this dynamic not as apparent in the *95 Theses*? Luther clearly meant that they were meant for debate and had hope that they would reform the church. He even went into his discussion with Cajetan, hoping to discuss the issues of indulgences, and Cajetan focused on papal authority. Luther had an honest hope that things could change, but his lifelong experiences

---

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, “Luther's Last Battles,” 133-134.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards, “Luther's Last Battles,” 135.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, “Luther's Last Battles,” 136.

crushed that hope. He lashed out in anger and heavy polemic when confronted with the entities that crushed his hope for a changed world. This reason does not excuse his behavior but enlightens an issue regarding Christian nationalism. Luther lashed out because his fear drove his writing later in life. He wanted to protect what he had achieved. He was a loving individual at home and among his family and friends, and he often frustrated his wife with his unending generosity.<sup>11</sup> His family and home at Wittenburg fit into the place that the church had early in his life. However, as I have said, there are different ways to care for the people one loves.

Drawing from Luther's lost hope, we gain a new piece to the overall issue. Luther lost hope, and hope is what drives actual change. Indeed, other factors play into this dynamic but hope drives change in the world. Luther lost that hope for change, and while the political dynamics forced a change for the Reformation movement, Luther had depended on the ideological conversation because it was in this dialogue that he saw change could happen. Unfortunately, it did not for the most part in his lifetime, and even to this day, some of the issues he raised still exist. His loss of hope meant that he changed tactics to vulgar polemics that brought damage not only to his reputation but to the Reformation movement as well. Christian nationalism represents a loss of hope for the future of the world. The movement does not have a vision of hope but defines itself on what idols it wants to protect. In protecting these idols, members of the movement lash out in violence because they believe these idols need protecting or the idols give them an identity, whether it is a revisionist history, white supremacy, or

---

<sup>11</sup> Lull and Nelson, *Resilient Reformer*, 327-331,344.

repurposed national symbols. In many ways, the late Luther looked like a Christian nationalist in the US, even to the point where Luther had some nationalist tendencies late into his life.<sup>12</sup>

### **Hope is Not Lost<sup>13</sup>**

The fact remains that Lutherans still exist today, and so someone had hope for a better future. When Luther was asked to summarize his theology for the Smalcald League, he gladly wrote a document meant for the potential council with the Roman church. Luther hoped to be active in this gathering to accept the document, but illness prevented him from participating. His document, however, did not get accepted at this gathering because Melanchthon felt the section on the papacy was too polemical and would prevent any fruitful conversation and reconciliation if a council were to happen. Many people did indeed sign Luther's *Smalcald Articles*, but the gathering accepted a document written by Melanchthon entitled *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*.<sup>14</sup> I will thus next compare the two texts and analyze how Melanchthon's response carries an aspect of hope that Luther's does not.

#### *Two Texts*

The *Smalcald Articles* does not represent the harshest texts Luther writes towards the end of his life. He begins the text with Trinitarian language and analysis, which never was a point of disagreement between Lutherans and Romans. However, his section on papal authority contains vulgar and violent language. Melanchthon approached the topic as a continuation of what was

---

<sup>12</sup> LW 41:269.

<sup>13</sup> I will be using the translation of the *Smalcald Articles* and *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* as found in Kolb and Wengert's *Book of Concord*. Hendel's translation is a revision of the *Smalcald Articles* and I will refer to his translation when discrepancies appear between the two translations, but my primary quotes will come from the *Book of Concord* (See TAL 2.423 note 2).

<sup>14</sup> TAL 2.420-421. See also BC: 295-296 and 329-330.

written before this gathering. He argued that the *Augsburg Confession* and *Apology* should serve as the primary texts, and the *Treatise* was added to appease certain delegates.<sup>15</sup> Several key differences between the two writings demonstrate the effectiveness of Melanchthon's approach over Luther's polemic. First, Melanchthon brings in vital biblical passages from throughout the Reformation that disputed the authority and power of the papacy, while Luther also includes passages to hurl insults. Second, while both use the term "Antichrist" in describing the papacy, Melanchthon divorces the term from its eschatological sense and any soteriological connotations by turning it into a political term.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Melanchthon did not conclude within his text that change is impossible.

Luther's use of scripture to insult the papacy takes focus away from his argument. He begins by sarcastically associating the pope with the angel who roars like a lion in Revelation 10:3.<sup>17</sup> Luther's point is that the papacy views itself as a great and magnificent being worthy of praise. However, his oddest use comes from Zechariah 3:2, where Luther encourages his readers not to bow before the pope or kiss his feet, as was practiced in Medieval Europe. Instead, they should say, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan."<sup>18</sup> This use of scripture serves no other purpose

---

<sup>15</sup> TAL 2.421.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the use of "Antichrist" has been used in inflammatory ways to attack the papacy beyond Luther and has caused issues for everyday Catholics. I am using it here to demonstrate the distinct difference between how Luther and Melanchthon use the term, but I also acknowledge that they could have approached their points in better ways than use this term.

<sup>17</sup> SA II:4.4.

<sup>18</sup> SA II:4.16. This translation comes directly from the translation I am using for the *Smalcald Articles*. The NRSVUE translates this passage as "The Lord rebuke you, O accuser." The Hebrew word used for "accuser" is אָשָׁם the Hebrew word that "Satan" is derived (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 966). However, as the context of Zechariah 3 shows, the function of this entity is to be a prosecutor or adversary as other translations suggest. See also Job 1:6.



except for Luther to call the papacy Satan one more time before departing from the article and that section of the *Smalcald Articles*. While he does allude to scripture in several places that are helpful to his argument, he does not expand upon them or cite them. His quotes from Paul are essential in his argument regarding the use of *κύριος* (lord) in reference to the pope instead of Christ and 2 Thessalonians 2:4's assertion that "He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God."<sup>19</sup> While these seem to be minor critiques from a modern reader of Luther, Melancthon takes a more sensible approach to scripture.

Melancthon's approach addresses each scripture in its context and why it is a part of his argument. For example, he cites Luke 22:24-27 as a place where Christ forbids lordship among the disciples. Instead, the passage argues that all share in an equal ministry, which connects to Melancthon's general argument: the papacy considers itself lord over all Christianity and not a bishop equal to other bishops.<sup>20</sup> He also cites John 20:21 as a passage where Jesus commissions the disciples as equals with no privilege or lordship over the others.<sup>21</sup> Melancthon continues this practice when addressing texts used against the Lutherans. He returns to Matthew 16:18-19 and represents the critiques of these passages in terms of penance as had previously been explained by previous writings, including Luther's. Melancthon also rejects that a ministry can be built on a person and only on Christ alone.<sup>22</sup> He also reiterates the Reformer's stance that John

---

<sup>19</sup> SA II:4.1-2 and 10-11. See also BC 307 note 52.

<sup>20</sup> Tr 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Tr 9.

<sup>22</sup> Tr 22-28.

21:15-17 does not give Peter any unique identity or job, but rather the job typical to all ministers in the church: to administer God's word and sacrament.<sup>23</sup> Melanchthon's use of scripture adds to his argument and does not distract from his task.

Luther makes a distinct eschatological connection with his use of "Antichrist."

This business shows overwhelmingly that he is the true end-times Antichrist, who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, because the pope will not let Christians be saved without his authority (which amounts to nothing, since it is not ordered or commanded by God). This is precisely what St. Paul calls "setting oneself over God and against God. Neither the Turks nor the Tartars, despite being great enemies of the Christians, do any such thing. They allow whoever desires it to have faith in Christ, and they receive physical tribute and obedience from the Christians."<sup>24</sup>

Luther's point draws the reader into the apocalyptic mindset of Revelation with his use of "end-times" in this text. Kolb and Wengert note that the term Luther uses here for "end-times" refers to the Christ who comes at the end of times. So this Antichrist is literally the one who faces Christ in the end times. His connotations of end times drive his argument into the battle of the forces of good and evil in a cosmic sense. Luther also gives his readers no direction in dealing with this cosmic battle.

Melanchthon uses the term "Antichrist" in terms of temporal power.

Moreover, the marks of the Antichrist clearly fit the reign of the pope and his minions. For describing the Antichrist to the Thessalonians, Paul calls him an adversary of Christ who "exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God" [2 Thess. 2:4]. He is speaking, therefore, of someone reigning in the church, not of pagan rulers, and calls that one an adversary of Christ because he will invent doctrine that conflicts with the gospel and arrogate to himself divine authority...the pope is not willing to be judged by the church or by anyone else and places his authority above the judgment

---

<sup>23</sup> Tr 30-31.

<sup>24</sup> SA II:4.10-11.

of councils and of the whole church. To refuse to be judged by the church or by anyone is to make himself God.<sup>25</sup>

Melanchthon repurposes the “Antichrist” from its eschatological and apocalyptic connotations and focuses on the issues of power and authority. While the term “Antichrist” will have a particular reaction from his readers, Melanchthon is following the tradition of concretely applying scripture to contemporary situations. He does not view this battle as some cosmic battle but one in which he accuses the papacy of overstepping his authority and thus taking over power that belongs in the hands of the people who make up the church.

Luther did not have hope that reform in the Roman church was possible because the papacy’s power and authority defined the Roman church itself. From Luther’s view, the papacy can no longer accept councils, despite what history has shown, such as Constance. The pope’s government has become too entwined with the pope’s person that to abdicate any power would obliterate the papacy. He further argues that Christianity cannot be contained under one head because of the different sects that constantly come up in Christianity. For the papacy to rule, it would need to come as a matter of human goodwill and not divine command. In Luther’s mind, the church is better off functioning with all of its bishops worldwide, working together equally and finding common ground in the church’s practices.<sup>26</sup> Luther concludes thus that the papacy should cease to exist since any change would destroy it.

Melanchthon, on the other hand, prescribes a solution for papal reform. After listing the Reformer’s issues with the papacy, he calls upon the church to reject the pope’s authority. Next,

---

<sup>25</sup> Tr 39-40.

<sup>26</sup> SA II:4.7-9.

he calls for a council of rulers who would hold the pope accountable for his crimes. This council would not be ruled over by the pope or his allies but rather by the people of the church. In this way, the pope can be rebuked, and the council can move in directions to correct the errors of the papacy.<sup>27</sup> Melanchthon not only has hope for change, but he sees a clear path to that change. While he may agree with Luther in the background that the papacy should not survive as an office, Melanchthon still wants to see some reunification beyond just a shared ministry. Historically speaking, what Melanchthon hoped for did not come to pass, and things instead got worse. However, his approach still was more robust than Luther's because his hope gave him a vision of what could be rather than rejecting all possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

In concluding this overall section, I have demonstrated a harmful use of the Later Luther writings. His hyperbole and violent language did little to aid the Reformation in his later years, and even in many ways, his writings smack of the hyperbole that comes from other nationalist movements. Other issues in Luther's life did play a role in why he acted the way he did, but that does not excuse how much harm came out of it. We can learn from this example that fear should not be the guiding factor of Christianity. Instead, a hope for something better should guide the words and practice of Christianity. While yes, things can go against the progress of good in the world, Christians hope that even in the darkest moments, God's light will shine through and bring salvation in whatever form it needs to be. Even though Melanchthon's hope was also crushed in the years after his document on the pope's primacy, he still hoped for something better for the church and Germany.

---

<sup>27</sup> Tr 52-59.

As a final thought, Luther's resentment matches much of what drives Christian nationalism in the United States. Cooper-White argues that ordinary people who get caught up in Christian nationalism do so for the following purposes. First, Christian nationalism gives them a sense of belonging and purpose. Second, it propagates and encourages feelings and behaviors conducive to white supremacy. Third, Christian nationalism responds favorably toward patriarchal authority. Finally, Christian nationalism allures ordinary people with its influential conspiracy theories.<sup>28</sup>

Luther's sense of belonging gets crushed by his excommunication from the church. It drove him to seek out the support of his rulers and, as such, drove some German nationalist tendencies within his writings, something Nazi Germany indeed adapted into their structures. While Luther does not have the white supremacy grown and developed in the United States, his diatribes against the Jews and Turks have racial connotations. However, if we apply Cooper-White's description more broadly to include other social "Others," this can include Roman Catholic leaders and Anabaptists within his diatribe. Luther became heavily focused on his ideas late in life and denied the validity of other perspectives or peoples simply because of their identity.<sup>29</sup> While Luther would undoubtedly abide by a strong patriarchal authority according to modern standards, this area differs from Christian nationalism. One possible argument for similarity could be that in calling for the destruction of convents, women had one less place to live independently of a life of marriage. Finally, Luther fell to many of the common conspiracy

---

<sup>28</sup> Cooper-White, *The Psychology*, 41f.

<sup>29</sup> Cooper-White does indeed broaden this scope by having multiple categories of targets that Christian nationalists target. See Cooper-White, *The Psychology*, 33.

theories regarding Jewish people in the medieval era, some of which still plague the modern world. None of the above is to say that Luther had elements of the above prior to his excommunication. He certainly had some elements of antisemitism throughout his life. At the end of his life, Luther took a sudden upswing stimulated by many factors. None of these reasons excuse Luther's behavior, nor does it for Christian nationalists. Instead, as Cooper-White confirms, ordinary people falling into traps of hate often have many complex factors, some of which could be addressed in ways for the benefit of all people.

## Conclusion

In this project, I explored Luther's response to papal sovereignty. Papal sovereignty derived itself from scripture such as Matthew 16:13-19, interactions with emperors such as Constantine and Charlemagne, and by functioning as a temporal leader over lands either granted or taken by the papacy. While the claim of being an Apostolic See has some critics, the papacy became a force in Europe. Due to this power, the idea of conciliarism grew in the Roman church and into the Reformation itself. At the time of the Reformation, Luther's questioning of indulgences, while pastoral at first, was received as an attack on the papacy's authority. Because of the tension of conciliarism, the papacy and its allies saw any questioning of the decrees or actions of the pope as an affront to the church. Whereas Luther wanted to focus on the issue of justification, his enemies began to attack him on the question of the pope's authority. As a result, the question of papal primacy became a central theme of the Reformation, and Luther went from slight ambivalence towards papal authority to wishing for reform and, finally, an outright rejection of the papacy as a legitimate office. Luther's anger in later years promoted violence and ridicule of the pope and raised concerns among his allies.

I wanted to explore this topic because I am interested in what Luther's response to papal sovereignty could offer in the debate of Christian nationalism in the US during the twenty-first century. During Luther's early era, I demonstrated the importance of the gospel meant for Luther. He argued that no one should be restricted or barred from receiving it, nor should it be sold off like with indulgences. Luther saw the papacy as a gatekeeper of God's word and accused

the pope of trying to monopolize Christianity for the sake of money. Christian nationalism also seeks to monopolize Christianity. The United States did not develop as a Christian nation, nor should Christian identity be identified with “American” identity. When Christian nationalists claim that one can only be an American if one is Christian, they neglect the complete diversity of Christianity in the world. It insists that only true Americans can know the Gospel.

In this same track, it is essential to be clear on what the Gospel is. The Gospel is not going to be good news for those in power. The Gospel is not about the superiority of race, gender, sexuality, or nationality. The Gospel is defined as being good news to all people. If one’s Christian identity proclaims a gospel that only money can buy or a specific identity can hold, it is not the Gospel. The practice of indulgence brought financial harm to people in Luther’s time, and he grew very vocal over the pope’s designations of who was in or out of the Roman church. As a result, this particular conclusion from Luther’s early life takes on two critical factors. First of all, Christian nationalism monopolizes the Christian identity while at the same time not giving any benefit to anyone but harm. Second, Christianity must be clear on what it means when it says Gospel. Christian nationalism has no Gospel and, therefore not a Christian entity or ideology but rather a fraud.

From the post-Leipzig era, Luther’s ecclesiology of the priesthood of all believers also serves as a critique of Christian nationalism. Luther criticized the papacy for not allowing the full participation of the laity within the church. The papacy's hesitation in allowing such a practice was grounded in the history of conciliarism in the Roman church. However, Luther redefined the church away from its hierarchy and institution. He centralized it on the living and breathing people of the world. The priesthood of all believers relies on the gifts of all people for the



betterment of the church and the world as a whole. It gives the laity a new purpose: their work can also be considered “church work” just as much as the spiritual priest, bishops, and popes. While Luther gave too much power to the secular rulers at the cost of lives, applying this priesthood to all believers takes an interesting turn for modern government systems. Christian nationalism gets stuck on its leaders, such as Donald Trump, and is unwilling to believe that all believers' priesthood extends beyond their identity. This practice creates echo chambers that continue to fill with similar thinking and do not allow the insight of other “priests” to encourage or hold accountable Christian nationalists.

While Luther's late life has many elements akin to Christian nationalism, his early life has many differences. Luther's early concerns in *The 95 Theses* focus heavily on pastoral concerns, and while he does question papal authority, he does not connect national identity distinctly akin to modern Christian nationalism. The idea of Christendom for Luther had its boundaries that ended at the borders of non-Christian countries, but those countries still had their leaders. From Luther's perspective, these leaders acted out their roles through their given identity in baptism. Their baptism came first over any national identity or affiliation, and their work as rulers regarding the church stems from that baptism. While they were not “spiritual priests,” the secular rulers still acted in the priesthood of all believers through their vocations as rulers. Luther's conception of the priesthood of all believers thus runs counter to Christian nationalism because Christian nationalism wants to blend the identities. In contrast, Luther will always say baptism supersedes any identity and goes further to say that all identities owe their existence to that baptism.

On the other hand, the Late Luther demonstrates a polemic and hatred akin to Christian nationalism. Luther matches the identity of someone who gets caught up in the hatred of Christian nationalism because of underlying causes that resulted from events in his life. Some of this gets driven by propaganda issues such as medieval antisemitism. Other perspectives are driven by personal experiences and encounters with others (thus his “Antichrist” language.) Ultimately, while Luther, late in his life, matches the hatred and polemic of Christian nationalism, his ecclesiology has a distinct anti-nationalist tendency because nationality remains distinct and subordinate to Christian identity.

This priesthood of all believers must have a strict understanding of the Gospel in their actions. While certain practices may not be allowed by certain Christian groups, this does not mean that others should have to follow suit in obeying them. Thus a Christian leader must understand that in doing their work, they need to listen and hear others and make decisions in accordance with the broader political landscape. It is not a lesson Luther was able to learn, but it is nevertheless something any Christian should know how to do. Good Christian practice means working alongside other Christians to make the world a better place for everyone, not just other Christians. As anyone who has participated in any congregation knows, drama, tension, and fighting happen in the church. However, we are still called to see our opponents as co-priests. Any Christian leader grounded in this thinking can easily apply it in their work.

Finally, fear should not be the guiding factor of any Christian practice. Christian nationalism’s deep stories involve a fear of losing something that did not even exist. The fear of white supremacy comes from the false idea that white people will be harmed if another race gets lifted up. Christian nationalists believe that the influx of different religious and philosophical

identities will eventually force them to believe in something other than their version of Christianity. Their fear makes them project their own practices and desires onto other entities. While healthy fear helps promote safety and guidance, fear that becomes an idol breaks community bounds and, in the extended scope, destroys the livelihood of those possessed by it. Luther's fears drove his polemical writings and crushed his hope for reconciliation between the Romans and Lutherans. His fear made him short-sighted and not focused on what could happen in the future. He became entrenched in the arrogant assumption that he lived in the end times and that his generation would be the last to live on this planet. Over 500 years later, the traditions of the Reformation still exist, and there is hope for reconciliation between some of these church bodies and the Roman church.

Christian nationalists also resort to this short-sighted thinking and apocalyptic mindset. This crops up in conversations about immigration regarding "monsterized" beings who bring drugs or "terrible people."<sup>1</sup> In Revelation 13, the vision of the monsters from earth and sea takes on mythic proportions in which people tremble in fear. Christian nationalists adopt this motif and twist it by dehumanizing their opponents until they are nothing more than monsters.<sup>2</sup> This motif drives them to seek salvation in which God comes into this world and either pulls them off it in the sense of Dispensationalism or destroys all of their enemies. There is no perceived future in which reconciliation can occur because the world will end. Luther fell into this very trap, and it caused harm to his movement. Christians have a responsibility to hold Christian nationalists

---

<sup>1</sup> Gorski and Perry, *The Flag and the Cross*, 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Grayvold, "Marks and Tweets," Forthcoming.

accountable for their work not just because it harms Christians but also because Christians grounded in the Gospel have a hope for a better world.

One question remains: why did I choose to use the topic of papal sovereignty as the focus of this study? Much of what I have just described can be found in other works by Luther. I choose the topic of papal sovereignty because it put Luther's theology into a real-world situation. While Luther did get violent with his criticism of the papacy, many of the things he accused the papacy of doing did happen. Not only did they happen, but very little was done to address Luther's concerns until much later in history. As a matter of practical theology, papal sovereignty is a good example for applying Luther's ecclesiology. The papacy also gave form to how Luther would approach the sacraments by specifically setting Matthew 16's Keys into the connotation of the forgiveness of sins. Even when Luther did not apply his work well, he still provided a negative example that one could follow. Christian nationalism thrives on authoritarian mindsets, and Luther saw the papacy as a form of tyranny. While Luther would later be accused of having an authoritarian mindset, I have demonstrated that his fight with the papacy demonstrates a very anti-authoritarian perspective regarding his ecclesiology. His ecclesiology instead called for an inclusive church that, despite him not completely following, paved the way for more inclusive ecclesiology from the church bodies that came from the Reformation.

Moving forward, I think other theologians have grown out of the roots of Luther's fight with the papacy. I see Kierkegaard's questioning of Christendom as something stemming from this conversation and giving more help in addressing Christian nationalism. I also see Barth's and then Bonhoeffer's questioning of religion as another place where the intersection of the modern world and politics could answer the question of Christian nationalism. These are just a

few of the places that I can see that can offer a further critique of Christian nationalism and work towards a Lutheran or Luther-inspired response to it. While many sociologists have dealt with this subject, more theologians must address this issue.

To end this project, I will leave this quote from the most recent document out of the Catholic and Lutheran dialogues.

Christian service to humanity and the world includes championing human dignity and inviolable human rights, providing generous aid in situation of special distress, and working on projects directed toward promoting long-term solutions to overcome misery (*Church and Justification*, §§287-88). Christians—in their various callings and spheres of activity—are called to make contributions “in all areas of social life—in politics, education and nature, health, science, culture and the mass media” to “promote lives in accord with human dignity and reverence toward God” (*Church and Justification*, §289).<sup>3</sup>

May this sentiment guide all Christians fighting tyranny in all its forms.

---

<sup>3</sup> Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Declaration on the Way*, 37-38.

## REFERENCE LIST

- Bailey, Sarah P. 2022. "Southern Baptist Leaders Covered Up Sex Abuse, Kept Secret Database, Report Says." *The Washington Post*. May 22. Accessed March 9, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/05/22/southern-baptist-sex-abuse-report/>.
- Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs. 1977. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brown, Raymond E., Karl P. Donfried, and John Reumann, . 1973. *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*. Minneapolis and New York: Augsburg Publishing House and Paulist Press.
- Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 2015. *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
- Cooper-White, Pamela. 2022. *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism*. Kindle Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Durant, Will. 1957. *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*. New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Edwards, Mark U. 1984. "Luther's Last Battles." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48 (2 & 3): 125-140.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). 2022. *Constitution for Synods*. Chicago: ELCA Assembly, 2022.
- Fromm, Erich. 2013. *Escape From Freedom*. Kindle Edition. New York: Open Road Media.
- Gorski, Philip S., and Samuel L. Perry. 2022. *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. Kindle Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Grayvold, Erik. Forthcoming. "Marks and Tweets: Apocalyptic Imagery in the US Anti-vaxxer Movement." *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi*.
- Gritsch, Ruth C. 1981. *Luther on Ministerial Office and Congregation Function*. Translated by Eric W. Gritsch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Halsall, Paul. 1996. *Medieval Sourcebook: Gregory VII: Dictatus Papae 1090*. January 26. Accessed February 16, 2023. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/g7-dictpap.asp>.

- Hendel, Kurt K. 2015. "The Smalcald Articles 1538." In *The Annotated Luther: Word and Faith*, edited by Kirsi I. Stjerna, 417-477. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Hendrix, Scott H. 1981. *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- . 2015. *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Janz, Denis R., ed. 2008. *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Kittelton, James M., and Hans H. Wiersma. 2016. *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Lull, Timothy F., and Derek R. Nelson. 2015. *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Luz, Ulrich, and James E Crouch. 2001. "Jesus' Withdrawal from Israel and the Origin of the Church (13:53--16:20)." In *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, edited by Helmut Koester, 299-377. Minneapolis: 1517 Media.
- Marius, Richard. 1999. *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Moloney, Francis J. 1998. *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13-21*. Kindle Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- O'Malley, John W. 2010. *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present*. Lanham: Roman & Littlefield Publishes, INC.
- . 2013. *Trent: What Happened at the Council*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Persaud, Winston. 2023. "Theological Non-Negotiables in Martin Luther's Hymns for Confessing Jesus Christ in the Twenty-first Century." *Currents in Theology* 50 (2): 9-15. <https://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/405/430>.
- Rieger, Joerg. 2007. *Christ & Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times*. Kindle Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Schimmelpfennig, Bernhard. 1992. *The Papacy*. Translated by James Sievert. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schmitt, Carl. 2005. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Kindle Edition. Translated by George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Shortle, Allyson, Eric McDaniel, and Irfan Nooruddin. 2022. "Americans are Growing More Accepting of Christian Nationalism." *The Washington Post*. September 1. Accessed

October 28, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/09/01/marjorie-taylor-greene-christian-nationalist/>.

Siedentop, Larry. 2014. *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*. Kindle Edition. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

U.S.A. National Committee, Lutheran World Federation, and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. 1974. *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*. Edited by Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.

Vaillancourt, Jean-Guy. 1980. *Papal Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd.

Whalen, Brett E. 2014. *The Medieval Papacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. Kindle Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.



## VITA

Rev. Erik Grayvold was born and raised in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, he attended St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work in 2009. He then attended Wartburg Theological Seminary from 2009 to 2014, taking a year off to serve as an English Aid and Pastoral Assistant for the Lutheran Church and School of Hope in Ramallah, Palestine, from 2012-2013. He received a Master of Divinity and was ordained in 2014 after taking his first call in Chesterton, IN

Currently, Rev. Grayvold is the Interim Bible Study Teacher at St. Francis Episcopal Church in Chesterton, IN, where he also lives. He also provides pulpit supply services for many congregations in Northwest Indiana