

Letter to Luther

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#Religion

To
Dr. Martin Luther
Wartburg
99817 Eisenach
Germany

Dear namesake,

since you have become immortal as many of your fans and admirers write about you in their books for your jubilee, I have decided to send this letter to you and hope that it will reach you wherever you are.

You will soon be remembered all over the world this year 2017. It is the anniversary of the reformation of the church. You will be celebrated.

You did not really want it back then, but you founded a new branch of Christianity. Actually, your intention was to only improve the horrendous state of the church at that time. You were first Catholic, then a Reformed Christian. But as a side-effect - and that is something you could not have foreseen - you co-founded the modern age, mainly because of your novel views of the relationship between God, man, and the church at that time.

How did it actually happen back then on July 2, 1505, when you allegedly had walked into this 'thunderstorm' and after you were heavenly saved from a bolt of lightening that is said to have struck right in front of your feet decided out of the blue to not only enter just any convent,



The 'Wartburg' in Eisenach,
Germany

but one with the strictest rules at that time ?

There is hardly anyone ever who had entered a monastery head over heels like you had. Even though the times were different back then, most try out several monastic communities. Usually, personal reflections should let an entrance into a monastery grow over extended time periods. But not in your case. Both of

your parents were shocked about your sudden career change from one day to the next and were vehemently against your entry into the monastery, especially your father as you know.

Incidentally and five hundred years later, a very different view about your hastily escape from the 'world' and your sudden cancellation of your law studies is there to finally be unveiled.

Also in 1505 you had passed your master's degree in law along with your fellow student and friend Hieronymus Buntz who died shortly after the exam, a death that hit you hard. Years later, in November 1531, you mentioned in a speech that you had "severely injured your lower leg artery by an unfortunate coincidence", apparently involving your sword.

Five hundred years later I and many others still wonder how one can hurt himself hurt in such a way. A sword or saber usually sticks in a protective shell. How can it be that your sword had slipped out of the shaft, how could it not only cut the upper layers of the skin but actually be able to cut the vein ? Did you want to sit with your butt on the sword ? Did you put it in the wrong direction in between two chairs and tried to sit on both of them ? Many questions, my dear namesake, to which we have no clear answers from you until today.

What we have is not only research done by Catholic or other to you opposed biographers who confirm that the claim of an injury of the leg artery was a common white lie in your times for someone who got injured in a secret duel. You had presumably also engaged in a sword duel with another study friend named Conrad Wiegant, and whose traces are lost a little later. Did the first contact with the Augustinian friars happen already after these duels because over your fears associated with these sins ?

Can it be that you had previously fought with your fellow student Hieronymus Buntz about the exam grades so violently that your famous temperament made you draw a sword and hurt him so badly that he even died ? This would explain your sadness about his death, your strong self-reproaches from then on, and also the depressing memories about your friend since then.

This could - in stark contrast to the thunderstorm conspiracy theory - explain your hastily and sudden entrance into the monastery, at least. An entry into the black Augustinian order was probably the only way to prevent indictments for murder. Interestingly, your own words from 1532 confirm this scenario:

Following the unique counsel of God, I became a monk so they would not capture me. Otherwise, I would have been very easily caught. But they could not do it that way because the whole order took care of me.

(Weimar Edition T1, 326, page 134, in latin: 'Singular die consilio factus sum monachus, ne me caperent. Alioqui essem facillime captus. Sie autem non poterant, quia es nham sich der gantz orden mein an')

You also admitted in one of your sermons that you had been "ein grosser bub et homicida fui", that is 'a smart boy and a murderer' (Weimarer Edition 26, 509, page 9-12 and 30, from 1523). And you further said that "they wanted me on the Krägeli [the collar]", "I'm a monk against my own will" (Albert Mock: 'Abschied von Luther', Cologne 1985, page 51), as well as very irritating for us all about your sudden entrance into the monastery:

For I did not like it by heart, but was forced to do so and must do it considering the shame.

(Philipp Melanchthon, Vita Martini Luther, page 46; Albert Mock: 'Abschied von Luther', Cologne

It would bring your theological work into a new light if we could get answers from you on such important issues, contradictions, and questions.

As related to your famous views "sola fides", "sola gratia" and "sola scriptura" and your translation of the Bible, I have some more questions for you, dear namesake.

Sola Fides

How did you mean it exactly with your 'sola fides', your conviction that only the faith can save a soul, nothing else ? I suppose it was your answer to the back then completely out of control regulations regarding salvation from sins. You had rightfully preached exactly the opposite of the horrendous theological ideas at that time which stated that only the church law and their regulations - along with the appropriate monetary payments - could provide for the salvation of souls. Not a word about faith.

Five hundred years after your more than justified big bang however - and you could not foresee this back then - the practices of many believers have changed dramatically, to the extent that it is now your 'sola fides' that creates rather grotesque, even crazy forms of faith. A substitute for religion is taking place among ever-decreasing numbers of Christians in Europe. Back in your times, your 'sola fides' may have been the right spiritual vehicle to change some of the clerical and theological torture concepts. Today, your 'sola fides' is absorbed even by the even most progressive Christians who may enter a religious service only a few Sundays per calendar year, just to be thrown overboard on Monday morning at the latest - into the ocean of the ever increasing demands of the secular world. The result is a Germany and Europe dedicated to nothing but daily life and routine.

Your 'sola fides' actually steems from your conviction that the work of Jesus Christ would have been too great, too enormous, too gigantic, so that no one should even dare to come close doing what He did. Therefore it would be sufficient to only remember His act. Quite unlike it is the case in the Catholic Church until these days where - at least according to the theory - one should literally 'eat' and absorb the person and action of Jesus Christ into oneself, especially in a world that is diametrically opposed to a true Christian.

This so differently behaving secular world, or, in other words, billions of people formed by the modern era and it's natural sciences - their gradual developments made possible since you - have absorbed your 'sola fides' for over five hundred years now, and have since German philosopher Immanuel Kant pushed the faith into God into something purely subjective, and entirely personal.

This gave important room for great and fantastic human achievements through science. The answer to death however has not been answered yet. And honestly and only between us my dear namesake, despite Kepler, Copernicus and Galileo, the moon landing and the first images of possibly habitable extra-terrestrial planets, I had not a single woman in my life who would sit with me on a summer evening during a sunset at the beach, leaning against my shoulder and saying something like: "Oh, look my love, now the Earth has rotated so far again that our beach here is slowly falling into the shadow of our at the center of solar system located sun."

Even fivehundred years after the beginning of the modern era that you had ignited, the sun is still 'going down' in the evening and 'rises' in the morning. Almost everywhere on this globe.

Sola Gratia & Sola Scriptura

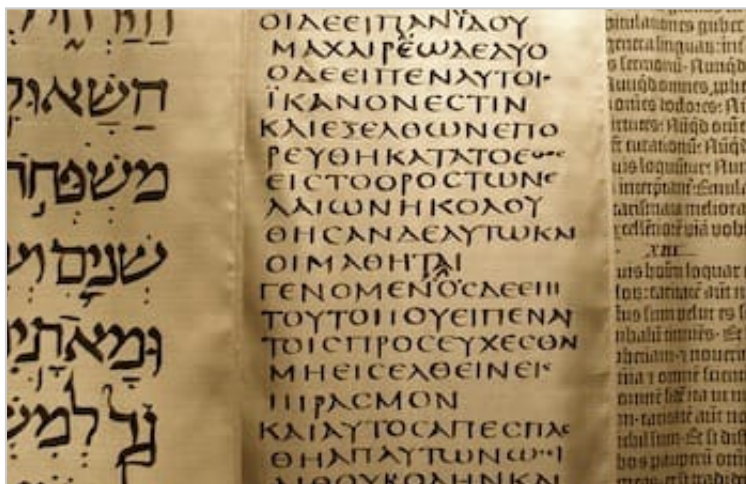
Your concept of 'sola gratia', meaning your idea that all is done solely by God's grace and not by human achievements, made more than sense in your time. But believe me, my dear namesake, you would most likely agree with me that five hundred years after you, a healthy revival of merciful works for the benefit of God's grace is needed again. You would be able to experience this if you could walk through many streets of today's megacities for example.

As far as your 'sola scriptura' is concerned, meaning your belief that only the Bible alone is needed to bring God's message of salvation to the people, I have my concerns with it as well from a today's point of view. In your time you had all reasons for this claim, of course. The bible was reserved for only a few because it was necessary to learn Latin and very few people in your time had the opportunity to do that - a life that lasted only around 35 years on average back then.

You have translated the bible, which was originally written in ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek, in an incredible act into the German language. A translation of the original scriptures is very difficult as you know, also because the ancient Hebrew language requires a completely different way of thinking which can not be easily translated into German words. In the ancient Hebrew language **there is no such thing like abstract thinking**: thoughts are described only by the use of the senses, so only by what one can see, touch, smell, taste and / or hear.

Perhaps one can demonstrate your translations of the old testament best with an example in order to illustrate the complexity of your work:

The German word 'Wut' (English: anger) in your German Bible has the equivalent Hebrew word 'awph' in the original texts but which literally means 'nose' (German: Nase). When a person is very angry, he/she usually starts to breathe heavily and his/her nasal walls begin to flicker.



An ancient Hebrew thus describes anger by visually perceiving a flickering of the nostrils and hence through his word hebrew word 'awph'. If, for example, this hebrew word in Psalm 103:8 is literally translated into 'nose', it would make no sense for most modern readers. Hence, 'nose' is translated in that

Psalm passage with 'anger', which is then embedded in the entire sentence and becomes 'slow in anger' or 'without anger' and eventually the most common translation found today for Psalm 103:8: 'rich in grace'. So the translations of the ancient Hebrew words actually need to happen twice, first in a precise translation of the original Hebrew word, and then again in the German (or other) language itself in order to provide for a semantic meaning to the modern reader. These circumstances make it difficult if not almost impossible to translate the true meaning of the original scriptures.

Additionally, centuries before you the original scriptures written in ancient Hebrew and Greek were already translated into Latin, a transformation of the original texts which had opened all gates for manipulations of the original meanings as well.

I would like to point out one of these critical text passages. The 'Our Father', one of the church's most important prayers, is still spoken according to your translation. There are two passages of the 'Our Father' in the New Testament, one in Luke, and one in the Gospel of Matthew. Today, the longer version according to Matthew is spoken. In the Greek original, the word 'epiousion' is utilized in **BOTH** Luke and Matthew in the passage where the daily bread is mentioned. This one greek word in both Gospels consists of the word 'epi' (meaning: supra, or higher) and 'ousia' (meaning: substance). Hence the original Greek word refers not only to a bread, but to a super-substantial bread, that is, one containing the essence of God in it - a heavenly, supernatural bread if you like and which has very little to do with our daily mass-produced slices from the supermarket.

Did you not realize that already the Latin translations in your time had described this one Greek word 'epiousion' in both gospels differently in Luke and Matthew ? In Matthew, the Latin translation speaks of a 'supersubstantialem' bread, in Luke only of a 'cotidianum'. You - or whoever - had decided to exclude God's essence in the bread in your German translation as well, and turned it instead into a simple and plain bread that shall be given daily. The actual meaning of the Greek original was completely changed.

This focus on a normal bread off the shelf was certainly a well-intentioned and important step towards a transformation of society in your time, to allow as many as possible access to such. In many of our present-day societies in Europe however, finding a bread that is still healthy is not so easy, and a return to an essential bread from God probably ever more important. I hope you can see this as well.

Incidentally, the thing with the bread has not been changed in the newly revised Lutheran Bible from 2016/17 and which now calls it a "bread that we need today". This new bible translation is considered to be "one of the highlights" of your Reformation Jubilee and whose "goal is to produce a greater linguistic accuracy and at the same time maintain the linguistic power of Martin Luther" (German Bible Society Stuttgart). Of Mary, who you have venerated all your life, is no longer said that she had received a child in this new bible by the way, but that she had become pregnant.

Many questions for you, dear Martin. Hope to hear from you soon. Until then, I wish you a happy and healthy anniversary.

Martin

Shalom.

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