

Martin Luther Essay Contest

**"Was Martin Luther a revolutionary or conservative leader in the 16th Century?"**

Martin Luther--one of the greatest theologians of his time, challenged The Roman Catholic Church--a powerful establishment whose power was built up over centuries. He believed that living by faith alone is needed to achieve salvation, while the church's theology was that both faith and good works were necessary. This resulted in a major religious break down in Western Europe which caused a great upheaval resulting in thirty years of war, and started a movement called "Protestantism". Although many can perceive this as revolutionary, I believe that Martin Luther was still a conservative leader.

Martin Luther did not start off as a religious leader, rather he was destined by circumstances. It was his way of thanking God for saving him from a severe storm that caused him to join the monastery. During his days there, he suffered from spiritual anxiety and he was never sure if he was doing enough good works to attain salvation. In order to relieve his mind, he started teaching at the University of Wittenberg. One day while reading the *Holy Bible* he chanced upon the verse in a sermon he was preaching, which stated "the just shall live by faith" which led to his belief of "Faith Alone". Luther discussed his finding with the church leaders and demanded a change in the practice of selling letters of indulgence. He wanted to keep all the teachings and beliefs that agree with the *Holy Bible*. This shows that he was conservative in wanting to change only the beliefs that did not agree with the Bible

Another point to consider is the pamphlet "95 Theses" written by Luther criticizing the selling of indulgences by John Tetzel. Luther wrote this in Latin, a language understood only by scholars and pinned it to the church door to enable a discussion regarding his work. Nothing was revolutionary about this as it would be a discussion among only Roman Catholic academics. However, a copy was later taken by someone, translated into German and distributed among the general public. In fact, when Luther learned about the leaked copy, he tried hard to get back the original, but was unsuccessful. Luther's attempt to retrieve the document, reiterates that he was not a revolutionary.

Furthermore, Luther's two documents, "An Admonition to Peace", and "Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants", clearly shows that Luther tried to avoid social rebellion at all costs and therefore was not a revolutionary. These documents were written in response to "The Twelve Articles", written by the peasants of Swabia, a document that expressed their grievances. The peasants approached Luther seeking his support to address their grievances. They believed that Luther could prove that their demands were in accordance to the scriptures. Luther realized that the content in these documents were about social and economic issues rather than theological issues; therefore he refused to support them. Luther had spoken many times of the freedom of the Christian, which was clearly related to the religion. In his work "An Admonition of Peace" Luther sided with the peasants and criticized the manorial lords,

but he did not justify using force. In his document “Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants” Luther called for very severe punishment for the rebels, which clearly indicates that Luther was totally against any form of social upheaval. This shows that Luther was a conservative.

In conclusion, I believe that Martin Luther was a conservative leader because he tried to do good, and bring back the Christian religion to its original form as intended by the *Holy Bible*. The Roman Catholic Church had drifted away so far from the teachings of Christ, that it seems like Martin Luther was placed there by destiny to bring back the purity of true Christianity. He wrote the “95 Theses” in Latin to not attract the upheaval of the general public, and just to discuss his thoughts with educated scholars. His other works “The Admonition of Peace” and also “Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants” also shows his intolerance towards violence.

Sources

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