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Response Paper 6

In the beginning of the 16th century the Catholic Church preached that the key to salvation was through the purchase of indulgences and doing good works that would benefit God. Augustinian monk, Martin Luther disillusioned by what he believed were abuses by the Catholic Church began to preach against these practices and questioned the authority of high ranking church officials. Luther, who eventually became the figure head of the Protestant Reformation believed that power within the church belong to God and that faith in him provided salvation. Contrary, to power outside of the church, which existed with the papacy, whose leaders claimed salvation was only attainable by church association which simply lead to damnation.

Luther did not agree with church authority who asserted salvation could only be found through an affiliation with the church. He argued that the power within the church was the result of faith. In a transcript given to a local printer by an audience member at a sermon preached by Martin Luther in Erfurt in 1521 he stated, "...the reason why salvation does not lie in our own works, no matter what they are; it cannot and will not be effected without faith."¹ Thus, Luther, maintained that grace was not prophesied based on a relationship with the Church, or human works. Without faith salvation cannot be achieved. Similarly, without faith, works are self-serving and do not benefit god. In his hymns, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, Luther reiterates the

¹ John W. Doberstein, editor, Luther's, vol. 51(Philadelphia: Fortress 1959), pp. 61-66

power of faith. He wrote, “On earth he has no equal, No strength of ours can match his might!”²

This hymn serves as a source of both written and oral evidence of the power of faith. Since singing in church was a significant component, Luther utilized it as a tool in presenting doctrinal teachings of faith. He declared that God is the ultimate being and not the pope.

Luther believed that authority outside the Catholic Church was held by high ranking church officials specifically the Pope and Cardinals. He disagreed with their assertion that the path to salvation was through the purchase of indulgences. Luther felt the sale and purchase of indulgences was the passageway to perdition. Luther’s viewpoint on the church is reinforced by Matthias Gerung’s, *Broadsheet, Lauingen, 1546*, which depicts participants in a baptism and a communion celebrating their faith. As a result they have a place in heaven, whereas, at the bottom of the illustration individuals purchasing indulgences from cardinals, portrayed as devils, are being dragged to hell. This illustration implies the sinfulness of seeking salvation by buying indulgences and solidifies the power of faith. Luther’s opinion on church hierarchy is further represented in a second work by Matthias Gerung, *Lauingen, Broadsheet, 1546*. It depicts Jesus deciding who will ascend to heaven and the devils below pulling people to hell. Only true believers in Christ would be chosen. Jesus and two angels are protecting those who have faith on the platform. It illustrates that true believers will receive salvation and protection from hell. The devil wearing the triple crown is meant to represent the Pope. Another individual wearing a turban represents a Turk. Those who propagated the sale of indulgences such as monks or cardinals are pulled into hell by two devils because they are doing the devil’s work. The work

² Lutheran Book of Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), hymn 229

equivocates the Pope to a Turk. The turks during this time were seen as enemies of the Catholic Church and evil. This comparison proliferates the perception that the Pope is equal to the Turks.

At the start of 16th century the Catholic Church claimed that the purchase of indulgences and earthly works for the benefit of God would bring salvation. Disenchanted by what he felt was corruption by the Catholic Church, Augustinian monk, Martin Luther challenged their policies and the power of church hierarchy. He conducted sermons that opposed the existing church traditions and ultimately became the leader of the Protestant Reformation. Luther subscribed that power within the church existed through God and that faith in him led to salvation. In contrast, power outside of the church, prevailed with the papacy, whose leadership professed salvation could only be procured by virtue of church membership and could be secured by buying indulgences. However, the church's power, would ultimately steer one to the flames of hell.