

*Working Paper #1, Module 1, Summer 2021 Internship Program.
Moral courage in the age of religion and the divine rights of kings
Thomas More and Martin Luther
Sunday, July 31, 2021*

7293 words

WORKING PAPER 1 Summer 2021, Module 1

MORAL COURAGE IN SOCIETIES WITH DIFFERENT VALUES:

SIR THOMAS MORE IN TUDOR ENGLAND AND

MARTIN LUTHER IN REFORMATION EUROPE.

I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.

God help me.

Martin Luther, Diet of Worms, April 1521.

Professor Kristen Monroe with Kendrick Choi, Nate Kang, Aniket Kamat, Alexis Kim, Michelle Kim, Thivinya Kobbekaduwa, Steven Ma, Maximilian Razmjoo, Ria Varma, and Anqi Wang

And the assistance of the other interns in Module 1

Does moral courage look the same in societies whose values most of us do not share? Indeed, can moral courage still exist in such societies? Or is moral courage as a concept so closely tied to the values of liberal democracies that it becomes moot to discuss it in other contexts? This examination becomes especially important since moral courage is so intimately linked to values in two ways. First, moral courage consists of acts that emanate from core values that are so fundamental that they can be said to create the actor's basic identity; turning away from these values thus constitutes a betrayal of oneself and necessitates action, despite the risks and consequences. Second, deciding what constitutes an act of moral courage depends heavily on the values of the analyst/observer. Values are critical, then, in deciding what distinguishes my act of moral courage from your act of betrayal or fanaticism. Was Mike Pence acting out of moral courage when he followed what he felt was his constitutional duty in certifying the results of the 2020 presidential election? Or was his boss right in saying, "You don't have the courage to make a hard decision." (Leonnig and Rucker 2021:) Similarly, were Mitt Romney and Liz Cheney acting out of conscience or political ambition when they refused to support Trump after January 6, 2020?

To gain traction on these thorny issues this Working Paper presents a three-part analysis. Part 1 summarizes what we know about moral courage as a general phenomenon, often set in the context of the liberal democratic societies in which most contemporary scholars work. Part 2 then analyzes the moral courage of Sir Thomas More in Tudor England and Part 3 examines the moral courage of Martin Luther in Reformation Europe. Each of these men is widely recognized as acting in morally courageous ways, More for his loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church and Luther for bravely criticizing the Roman Catholic Church for its corruption. Each man acted within – and seems to have accepted the tenets of -- moral systems with quite different values than our own. Indeed, More had no problem ordering the torturing and burning of heretics and Luther was a dreadful anti-Semite. Further, both men lived in an age that accepted the divine rights of kings, feudalism's emphasis on inherited position and privilege, the acceptance of slavery, mistreatment of women, imperialism and so on. Hence an analysis of their moral courage – and whether it differs from moral courage as more traditionally discussed in the

modern age – can lend insight into our understanding of how the context of moral actions can shape them.

PART 1. MORAL COURAGE IN LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC, HUMANISTIC SOCIETIES.

Fortunately, recent work on moral courage (Monroe and Hoyt 2021) summarizes findings on moral courage. We focus on the critical fourteen.

(1) Core values lie at the heart of moral courage. These core values center on caring for others, for social justice, equal laws, fairness, and treating everyone with decency, dignity, and respect.

(2) Values reflect human flourishing. Moral courage differs from simple courage insofar as moral courage emanates from values that make up the actor's identity, and these values reflect, are in keeping with or even advance human wellbeing and human life.

(3) Identity key. The importance of identity was critical, and lies at the heart of the core values driving moral courage. Acting out of one's character, and protecting that character, was a central concern, reflected in the term used by so many speakers: being able to look yourself in the mirror. This primacy of identity explains how morally courageous acts can be spontaneous without being impulsive. Acts evolve instinctively, out of my sense of who I am. These acts are not impulsive, however, since they emanate from deep within my character.

(4) Little agonistic choice. The centrality of character results in little or no agonistic choice.

(5) Recognize but disregard risk and consequences of acting. The consequences of acting morally courageous are noted but do not enter into any calculus of action.

(7) Agency. Some of the morally courageous appear high on agency while others do not. But the morally courageous accord agency to their opponents. They neither denigrate nor dehumanize them.

(8) Modesty. Beyond this, the morally courageous appear surprisingly humble, modest about what they had done. They all denied that they had done anything extraordinary. Their acts were simply those that –they insisted – anyone would do, even as many of them acknowledged that their acts would not have been necessary if everyone had acted as they did.

(9) Empathy. The morally courageous demonstrate extraordinary empathy, being able to put themselves into the place of the other, and hence find the sympathy-inducing understanding that drives them to act to help others, even if only in some small way.

(10) Connection. This empathy gave them a feeling of connectedness to others, feeling we are all part of a common humanity, and a gratitude for what they had been given in life that then led to a desire to give back to society and others in some way.

(11) The core values they acted upon often came from their families. Similarly, the support they needed during tough times also frequently emanated from families and friends.

(12) The values on which they acted – a sense of fairness, a desire for justice and equality, a feeling that all people have worth – were what made them the people they became. Living one’s values was important to them. ‘*If I am someone who believes in justice and fairness, then I have to act on it or become a hypocrite,*’ was the usual stance among those interviewed.

(13) All the above traits made them people for whom duty and conscience lay at the very core of their being. Not doing the right thing, pursuing winning at all costs, were not options for the morally courageous. They are willing to “*do the right thing*” regardless of the consequences, and are very clear that “*doing the right thing*” means working not for ideological causes but rather to further human wellbeing.

(14) Finally, moral courage seems to develop slowly, one small act at a time, resulting in what the authors refer to as the development of a kind of moral muscle.

Data. Does moral courage look the same in a different age? To examine this, we focus on the actions of Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) and Martin Luther (1483-1546). Both men lived in a world quite different from our own. The divine rights of kings was widely accepted and feudalism still provided the organizing framework for society. Torture was widely-tolerated as a normal part of public policy, and slavery and the subjugation of women and children went unquestioned. The period was dominated by religion and inherited privilege, and inequality was the norm, with rebellions demanding more equal rights being punished harshly. Although More was sainted by the Roman Catholic Church and is lauded as one of the first humanists, as Chancellor he tortured heretics – including burning them alive – because of their religious beliefs. Similarly, Martin Luther’s stand -- when he supposedly nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg -- is often cited as the quintessential act of moral courage: “Here I stand. I can do no other, God help me.” Yet Luther played a critical role in ushering in the wars of religion in which millions were killed, was anti-Semitic, and his views correspond closely to More’s on positions that would horrify most of us today. So these men thus fit the criteria of acting morally courageous in moral systems whose values we do not share.

Since neither of these men can be interviewed, we turn to different data for analysis. We rely on legal testimony from More’s trial for treason, and on his letters from prison. For Luther, we rely on his critique of the Roman Catholic Church in what is known as the 95 theses and on his public statements while examined in 1521 at Worms).

PART 2. SIR THOMAS MORE: HIS MORAL ACT AND THE TUDOR MORAL SYSTEM.

More had been a member of the inner circle of King Henry 8th of England. But More was a devout Roman Catholic;¹ when Henry broke with the Church over the Pope’s refusal to annul or divorce Henry’s wife, Catherine of Aragon, More refused to sign the Oath of Succession saying that Henry 8th was the head of the church in England and that his children with Anne Boleyn were legal heirs. This act is widely interpreted as marking More as a man willing to follow his conscience and risk his life for principle. At the time, More was known for his

integrity and good family life, even educating the women in his family just as he educated his sons. More entered Parliament in 1504 and quickly rose to hold many important offices, culminating with becoming Lord High Chancellor in 1529, where he proved efficient and loyal to Henry.

More's charmed life began unraveling because of religion. A devout Catholic, More considered the Protestant Reformation as heresy. He considered Martin Luther's calls for reform as a "call to war."^[33] and worked with Cardinal Wolsey to prevent the importation of Lutheran books to England. More authorized the spying on people suspected of being Protestants, especially book publishers, and held any Protestant tracts – including Bibles – seditious. Anyone found with these in their possession were subject to arrest and prosecution.

Act of moral courage. Indictment, trial, and execution. In the battle between Henry and the Pope, More was firmly in the Pope's camp. Cautious and diplomatic, More tried to walk the fine line between not challenging Henry while still keeping his conscience clear in the battle between religion and state. Unfortunately for More, in 1529 Parliament reinstated the crime of praemunire, a 14th century law that prohibited the assertion or maintenance of any foreign jurisdiction, including the Pope's jurisdiction, or any claim to supremacy over the monarch in England. It thus became a crime to publicly support any claim to legal jurisdiction over the King's by any authority (such as the Papacy) outside the realm. In 1530, the leading English aristocrats and church elders wrote a letter asking the Pope to annul Catherine and Henry's marriage. More refused to sign, signaling his independence. In 1531, things came to a head when a royal decree was issued, requiring all clergy to swear an oath recognizing Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. At a meeting of the English bishops at Canterbury in 1532, most bishops agreed to sign the Oath but only because of the law of praemunire and only after the oath added: "as far as the law of Christ allows". More than religion and a marriage was at stake. Breaking the power of the bishops was critical for Henry, who purged most of the clergy who refused to sign. More was one of those who declined to sign the Oath of Supremacy. He did not support Henry's efforts to annul the marriage to Catherine, but he did not openly oppose the King's actions either, mostly keeping quiet. More resigned as Chancellor in May 1532 but still enjoyed Henry's favor.

More's act of moral courage, then, consists of his principled refusal to sign the Oath of Supremacy, which required anyone holding a public or church office to swear allegiance to the king as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

DOCUMENTS. The treason trial against More.

We rely on the transcripts from More's trial for treason and his letters from prison.² We cite here only those excerpts that speak to the different aspects of moral courage the documents suggest re More. As we examined the legal documents relating to More's trial for treason, it is important to remember how many opportunities More had to be pardoned, and the extraordinary affection Henry seemed to have felt for More.³ His refusal to take advantage of these opportunities thus speaks to More's commitment to and his belief in his actions. Human motivation is complex but More's actions surrounding the Oath of Allegiance seem driven by conscience not by political expediency or self-interest.

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As we review these documents, we are first struck by More's treatment of his opponents, King Henry VIII and the Lords who accuse him of treason. Allowing for differences in expression, the contemporary mind is struck by an almost obsequious tone as More addresses the king – who does have the power to kill or pardon More – and the lords who are trying his case, most of whom are well known to More and who he knows are pandering to the king. As a footnote, perhaps, this same treatment was evident in others Henry killed or divorced (Catherine of Aragon trial, Anne Boleyn execution) so it seems reasonable to accept this behavior as reflecting the different mores of an age in which the king was considered divine and inherited privilege gave excessive power to the people at the top.

You see now how grievously you have offended his Majesty ; yet he is so very merciful, that if you will lay aside your Obstinacy, and change your Opinion, we hope you may obtain Pardon and Favour in his sight. But Sir Thomas stoutly reply'd, Most Noble Lords, I have great reason to return thanks to your Honours for this your great Civility, but I beseech Almighty God, that I may continue in the Mind I am in, thro' his Grace, unto Death.

Again More accords great respect to Henry when answering specific charges against him. *As to the first Crime objected against me, that I have been an Enemy out of stubbornness of Mind to the King's second Marriage; I confess, I always told his Majesty my Opinion of it, according to the Dictates of my Conscience, which I neither ever would, nor ought to have concealed: for which I am so far from thinking my self guilty of High-Treason, that on the contrary, being required to give my Opinion by so great a Prince in an Affair of so much importance, upon which the Peace of the Kingdom depended; I should have basely flatter'd him, and my own Conscience, had not I spoke the Truth as I thought: Then indeed I might justly have been esteemed a molt wicked Subject, and a perfidious Traitor to God. If I have offended the King herein; if it can be an Offence to tell one's Mind freely, when his Sovereign puts the Question to him; I suppose I have been sufficiently punish'd already for the Fault, by the great Afflictions I have endured, by the loss of my Estate, and my tedious Imprisonment, which has continued already near fifteen Months.*

Similarly, More concludes by saying he never spoke a word to any man against the Law he is accused of violating. He extends respect even to a law with which he disagrees. *To conclude, I do sincerely avouch, that I never spoke a Word against this Law so any Man living,*

So More accords respect to Henry and to the Lords who are trying him. BUT he does not seem to accord this same respect to Richard Rich, the person whose false testimony is what convicted him. Rich had been trained by More and wanted a job with him but was refused by More because More felt he lacked integrity as well as talent. But More lays it on the line about Rich, telling the Court Rich is a “mean fellow” with “a very lying tongue...and of no good Name and Character.” Concluding by saying, effectively, why would I confess something in casual conversation, to this lying whippersnapper when I refused to confess the same thing to real gentlemen who were formally questioning me?

“ In good Faith, Mr. Rich, I am more concerned for your Perjury, than my own Danger; and I must tell you, that neither my self nor any body else to my knowledge, ever took you to be a Man

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of such Reputation, that I or any other would have any thing to do with you in a Matter of Importance. You know that I have been acquainted with your manner of Life and Conversation long time, even from your Youth to the present Juncture, for we lived in the same Parish; and you very well know, I am sorry I am forced to speak it, you always lay under the Odium of a very lying Tongue, of a great Gamester, and of no good Name and Character either there or in the Temple, where you was educated. Can it therefore seem likely to your Lordships, that I should in so weighty an Affair as this, act so unadvisedly, as to trust Mr. Rich, a Man I had always so mean an Opinion of, in reference to his Truth and Honesty, so very much before my Sovereign Lord the King, to whom I am so deeply indebted for his manifold Favours, or any of his noble and grave Counselors, that I should only impart to Mr. Rich the Secrets of my Conscience in respect to the King's Supremacy, the particular Secrets, and only Point about which I have been so long pressed to explain my self? which I never did, nor never would reveal; when the Act was once made, either to the King himself, or any of his Privy-Counselors, as is well known to your Honours, who have been sent upon no other account at several times by his Majesty to me in the Tower. I refer it to your Judgments, my Lords, whether this can seem credible to any of your Lordships.

Again, More contrasts the acts of Rich with those of Henry, an opponent he respects – but also someone More knows has the power to punish More's family and who does, after all, have the power to commute More's sentence.

Besides, all the unspeakable Goodness of his Majesty towards me, who has been so many ways my singular good and gracious Lord, who has so dearly loved and trusted me, even from my first Entrance into his Royal Service, vouchsafing to honor me with the Dignity of being one of his Privy-Council, and has most generously promoted me to Offices of great Reputation and Honor, and lastly to that of Lord High-Chancellor, which Honor he never did to any Layman before, the same being the highest Dignity in his famous Kingdom, and next to the King's Royal Person, so far beyond my Merits and Qualifications; honoring and exalting me by his Incomparable Benignity, for these twenty Years and upwards, heaping continual Savors upon me; and now at last, at my own humble Request, giving me liberty to dedicate the Remainder of my Life to the Service of God for the better saving of my Soul, has been pleased to discharge and free me from that weighty Dignity; before which he had still heaped more and more Honors upon me: I say, all this his Majesty's Bounty, so long and so plentifully conferred upon me, is enough, in my opinion, to invalidate the scandalous Accusation so injuriously surmised and urged by this Man against me.

After More had been sentenced to death, he asks to speak to freely unburden his conscience. *When he had received Sentence of Death he spoke thus with a resolute and sedate Aspect: Well, seeing I am condemned, God knows ,how justly, I will freely speak for the disburdening my Conscience, what I think of this Law.*

Only then does More come out with a strong critique of the Oath of Allegiance, saying God must be first above all others on earth. He ends by declaring himself to be acting out of conscience, which he must do even if all the other honorable men in the Church disagree with him. *And therefore, my Lord, I do not think my self bound to conform my Conscience to the Counsel of one Kingdom, against the general Consent of all Christendom.*

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After he finishes speaking, More is criticized by one of his persecutors but refuses to strike back.

Norfolk: Sir Thomas, you shew your obstinate and malicious Mind.

More. Noble Sir, it's no Malice or Obstinacy that makes me say this, but the just necessity of the Cause obliges me to it for the Discharge of my Conscience ; and call God to witness, that nothing but this has excited me to it.

*After this the Judges kindly offering him their favorable Audience if he had any thing else to say; but that as the blessed Apostle St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present, and consenting to the Protomartyr Stephen, keeping their Clothes that stoned him to death, and yet they are both now holy Saints in heaven, and there shall continue Friends to Eternity; so I verily trust, and shall therefore heartily pray, that albeit your Lordships have been on Earth my Judges to Condemnation, yet that we , may hereafter meet joyfully together in Heaven to our everlasting Salvation: and God preserve you, especially my Sovereign Lord the King, and grant him faithful Counselors. **Accords dignity to his opponent. Not as expected.***

The Court rejects More's claim of conscience and concludes: *That he should be carried back to the Tower of London, by the Help of William Kingston, Sheriff, and from thence drawn on a Hurdle through the City of London to Tyburn, there to be hanged till he should be half dead; that then he should be cut down alive, his Privy Parts cut off, his Belly ripped, his Bowels burnt, his four Quarters sit up over four Gates of the City: and his Head upon London-Bridge.*

This was the Judgment pronounced upon this great Man, who had deserved so well both of the King and Kingdom, and for which Paulus Jovius calls King Henry VIII another Phalaris.

Did More's treatment of Henry pay off? Was this his intent in so honoring Henry?

This severe Sentence was afterwards, by the Kings Pardon, changed to beheading, because he had borne the greatest Office in the Kingdom; of which mercy of the King's, word being brought to. Sir Thomas he merrily said, God forbid the King should use any more such Mercy to any of my Friends, and God bless all my Posterity from such Pardons.

More continued this respectful behavior toward Henry at his execution.

Sir Thomas More having remained a Prisoner in the Tower about a Week after his Sentence, on the 6th of July early in the Morning, his old Friend Sir Thomas Pope came to him with a Message from the King and Council, to acquaint him, That his Execution was appointed to be before nine that Morning. Whereupon Sir Thomas said, He thanked him heartily for his good News. I have been, says he, much obliged to his Majesty for the Benefits and Honors he has most bountifully conferred upon me; yet I am more bound to his Grace, I do assure you, for confining me in this Place, where I have had convenient Place and Opportunity to put me in mind of my last End. I am most of all bound to him, that his Majesty is pleased to rid me out of the Miseries of this Wretched World. Then Sir Thomas Pope acquainted him, it was the King's Pleasure he should not use many Words at the Place of Execution. Sir, said he, you do well to acquaint me

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with the King's Pleasure; for I had otherwise designed to have made a Speech to the People; but it matters not, and I am ready to conform myself to his Highness's Pleasure. And I beseech you, Sir; you would become a Suitor to his Majesty, that my Daughter Margaret may attend my funeral. To which Pope replied, that the King was willing his Wise and Children, and other Friends should be present. Sir Thomas Pope being about to take his Leave, could not restrain from Tears. Whereupon Sir Thomas More said, Let not your Spirits be cast down, for I hope we shall see one another in a better Place, where we shall be free to live and love in Eternal Bliss. And to divert Pope's Grief, he took up his Urinal and shook it, saying merrily, I see no Danger-but that this Man may live longer, if the King pleases.

About Nine he was brought out of the Tower; his Beard was long, his face pale and thin, and carrying a Red Cross in his Hand, he often lift up his Eyes to Heaven; a Woman meeting him with a cup of Wine, he refused it saying, Christ at his Passion drank no wine, but Gall and Vinegar. Another Woman came crying and demanded some Papers she said she had left in his Hands, when he was Lord Chancellor, to whom he said, Good woman, have Patience but for an Hour and the King will rid me of the Care I have for those Papers, and every thing else. Another Woman followed him, crying, He had done her much Wrong when he was Lord Chancellor, to whom he said, I very well remember the Cause, and is I were to decide it now, I should make the same Decree.

When he came to the Scaffold, it seemed ready to fall, whereupon he said merrily to the Lieutenant, Pray, Sir, see me safe up; and as to my coming down, let me shift for myself. Being about to speak to the People, he was interrupted by the Sheriff, and thereupon he only desired the People to pray for him, and bear Witness he died in the Faith of the Catholic Church, a faithful Servant both to God and the King. Then kneeling, he repeated the Miserere Psalm with much Devotion; and, rising up the Executioner asked him Forgiveness. He kissed him, and said, Pick up thy Spirits, Man, and be not afraid to do thine Office; my Neck is very short, take heed therefore thou strike not awry for having thine Honesty. Laying his Head upon the Block, he bid the Executioner stay till he had put his Beard aside, for that had committed no Treason. Thus he suffered with much Cheerfulness; his Head was taken off at one Blow, and was placed upon London-Bridge, where, having continued for some Months, and being about to be thrown into the Thames to make room for others, his Daughter Margaret bought it, in closed it in a Leaden Box, and kept it for a Relique. Hall's Chron. Vol. 2. S. 2.

DO a table. Other ways in which More's MC corresponds to the contemporary use of the term? More's refusal to take advantage of these opportunities thus speaks to his commitment to and his belief in his actions. More seems driven by conscience not by political expediency.

PART 3. MARTIN LUTHER.

Martin Luther: Life. Luther and More were contemporaries, with More born in 1478 in England and Luther in 1483 in Eisleben, Saxony. While More was a prominent politician in England, Luther lived in relative anonymity as a monk and scholar until 1517, when he wrote a document attacking widespread corruption within the Roman

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Catholic Church. Luther's impetus was anger at the practice of selling "indulgences" to absolve sin; the document he penned became known as the "95 Theses" and contained two central beliefs that were anathema to More and which wreaked havoc on the world both men inhabited: (1) the Bible is the central religious authority and (2) human salvation can come only by faith and not by deeds. These ideas were not new but Luther's document proclaiming them came at a moment ripe for religious reform and the movement he helped spark was known as the Protestant Reformation. So in the end, unlike More, Luther changed the course of religious, and even political and cultural history, in the West. Although they lived in different places, and thus had different life experiences and political systems in which to act, both More and Luther were part of the same 16th-century Europe, a world described earlier in terms of attitudes, beliefs, and worldview.

Luther's act of moral courage: The 95 Theses. The immediate impetus for Luther's outrage came when Johann Tetzel, a friar in Germany, began selling indulgences in Germany in 1517 to raise money for the renovation of Rome's St. Peter's Basilica, a fact that infuriated Luther and led to his writing the *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*. Known as *The 95 Theses*, it posed a list of questions and propositions for debate. Although largely disputed by historians, legend has it that on October 31, 1517, Luther stormed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church and nailed a copy of his 95 Theses to the door, saying, "Here I stand. I can do no other." (Not as dramatic a story, it is more likely Luther simply hung the document on the church door somewhat routinely, as a kind of announcement and invitation to the academic discussion Luther proposed holding about this document and the topics it raised.) *The 95 Theses* themselves are written in a modest, academic tone, more one of questioning rather than accusation. But the ideas the document put forward were provocative, radical at the time although somewhat commonplace to us now. The first two theses argue (a) that God wishes for believers to pursue repentance and (b) that it is not deeds, but rather faith alone that leads to salvation. The rest of the theses, some of which do directly criticize the practice of indulgences, support these first two theses. Luther's document struck a popular chord and was quickly distributed throughout the German states. Inevitably, it eventually also came to the attention of the Church hierarchy in Rome. In 1518, Luther was called to Augsburg, to defend his views at an imperial diet (assembly). The lengthy, three-day debate was between the Church, represented by Cardinal Thomas Cajetan, and Luther. No agreement was reached. The church defended its use of indulgences and Luther refused to recant. This led the Pope to condemn Luther's writings, officially finding them in conflict with the teachings of the holy Roman Catholic Church on November 9, 1518. The Church convened a series of Papal commissions to examine Luther's teachings. The first commission found Luther's writings heretical; the second was milder but characterized Luther's writings as "scandalous and offensive to pious ears." Matters escalated until, in July 1520, Pope Leo X issued a papal bull branding Luther's propositions heretical. The pope gave Luther 120 days to recant in Rome. Luther again refused to recant, and was excommunicated on January 3, 1521, a serious punishment that effectively declared Luther a heretic in an age dominated by religion.

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Luther at the Imperial Diet of Worms (1521). Luther was invited to Worms by the Emperor, himself under pressure from the German princes who supported Luther, hoping the events sparked by the posting of Luther's 95 *Theses* would limit Rome's political power in Germany. Luther's most powerful supporter was Elector Friedrich the Wise of Saxon, who insisted Luther not be outlawed and imprisoned without a hearing. Luther's journey to Worms (spring 1521) was more victory celebration than repentance, with Luther preaching to enthusiastic crowds along the way. At Worms Luther was welcomed by public cheers and acclaim. His actual appearance at the Imperial Diet, like Thomas More's behavior during his trial for treason, was a model of well-thought-out presentation, objectivity, and legal cleverness. Both times Luther appeared before the Emperor, he was told to recant. Like More, Luther's legalistic training came to the fore: He claimed to find no proof against his theses, no views that would move him to recant: *"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."*

While the reference to conscience seems to clearly mark Luther – like More – as a man acting out of moral courage, there is little to no evidence that Luther ended his statement explaining why he could not recant with the famous statement of moral courage with which he is so often associated? *"Here I stand. I cannot do other."* The evidence here is lost to us. Scholars believe Luther did say, as he left the negotiations room, "I am finished." Certainly, for a while, this was the case. Luther was dismissed but not arrested since he possessed a letter of safe conduct (*Schutzbrief*) guaranteeing him 21 days of safe travel through the land. He began his travels home on April 25. After Luther and the princes who supported him departed from Worms, however, the emperor issued an Imperial Act (*Wormser Edikt*), declaring Luther an outlaw. This meant Luther could be killed by anyone, with no risk of punishment. Following this Wormser Edikt, Elector Friedrich the Wise thought it prudent to allow Luther to be kidnapped on his way home (May 4). Supposedly the kidnapping occurred with Luther's advance knowledge; it definitely helped preserve Luther's safety and let Luther quietly disappear from the public scene for a short while. (This action also prevented the Elector from being held liable for protecting an outlaw and heretic.) Luther was taken to Wartburg and the Reformation was given time to stabilize and strengthen.

On May 25, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (a Roman Catholic who owed his throne in part to the pope) signed an edict against Luther, a proclamation that ordered Luther's writings burned. (It is this same Charles V who played a role in More's drama since Charles sacked Rome in 1527 and imprisoned Pope Clement VII, thus ensuring that the Pope would not annul Henry's marriage to Charles's aunt, Catherine of Aragon, an event that then eventually led to Henry's decision to break with the Roman Catholic Church.) For the next year, Luther hid in Eisenach, beginning his translation of the *New Testament* into German, a task Luther took ten years to finish. Although translating the *Bible* may seem an unremarkable act, more dry scholarship than rabble-rousing, doing so reflected Luther's chief claim to being radical, even revolutionary: Luther's uncompromising assertion that the sole source of religious authority is

the Bible and that it should be translated and made available to everyone was a mutinous act for that period.

Luther fared better than More, who was executed 6 July 1535. And Luther's influence was greater. By the time Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1521, the movement his writings had unleashed had grown far beyond his influence and possibly his intent. The Protestant Reformation moved beyond a theological debate to become a political, religious, and social movement, as the idea that individuals could stand up to the church was reflected in the political drive to gain more individual rights against feudal landlords and kings. In 1524-1525, a rebellion known as the Peasants' war occurred in German-speaking parts of the Holy Roman Empire, protesting the heavy taxes and duties imposed on serfs, who then had no legal rights and no opportunity to improve their position in life. Other reformers – the Swiss Protestant Huldrych Zwingli (1484 – 1531) and the German Thomas Müntzer (circa 1490 - 1525) – supported this movement but Luther condemned it, and the movement ultimately failed. Over 100,000 peasants were killed and increased restrictions and harsh reprisals dampened further efforts to improve the plight of peasants. Luther himself became less involved in the Reformation. He had criticized the Church's policy of celibacy among the clergy and married a former nun, Katherine of Bora, in 1525, a marriage that produced five children. Luther seemed to have no enthusiasm for progressive politics but he did grow more strident in his public expression of his views, eventually arguing that the pope was the Antichrist. Luther's anti-Semitism later played a role in the Third Reich, and he condoned polygamy, based on his *Old Testament* reading of the lives of the patriarchs.

Analyzing Luther's acts of moral courage.⁴

Driven by concern for others. Although Luther was a controversial character, he clearly seems someone willing to go against social norms to do what he feels is right for people. This makes Luther someone who is guided by his concern for others and engages in a noble act. Luther's achievements were mostly never considering his own wills, but the people in this society's benefits. Most importantly, his work influenced the direction of the Western culture and the Christian religion and they would not be the same today without Luther's actions. However, Luther was also made a controversial character from his action later in his life, where he was hostile to the Jewish community and some historians have said may have portended German anti-Semitism.

Fidelity to values. -keeping his promise ● During his college life, Luther was caught in a horrific thunderstorm where it was possible for him to lose his life. Luther considered the incident a punishment and advice from God and promised that he would become a monk if he survived the storm. The legend has it, the storm was then gone and he was saved. ● This incident made Luther question the authority of the pope and how the power of God truly comes from the pope or the act of believing.

3. Opportunity Going to Rome, but was disappointed ● At age 27, Luther was given the opportunity to be a delegate of the monk community to a Catholic church conference in Rome.

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He was discouraged by the corruption he witnessed there among the Catholic priests. • Upon his return to Germany, he was miserable. So he enrolled in the University of Wittenberg in an attempt to forget his turmoil. He excelled in his studies and received a doctorate, becoming a professor of theology at the university (known today as Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg). • Two years later, after his studies of the Bible, Luther surprisingly finally gained religious enlightenment, while preparing a lecture on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he read, "The just will live by faith." • Finally, he realized the key to salvation was not to live in the fear of God or be enslaved by the church. but to believe and trust alone would bring salvation. This realization marked a major change in his life and set him in doing something- the Reformation. Section 3 4. 95 Theses,-

Moral Courage 2 a. Most famous achievements of Luther. b. Committed to the idea that salvation could be reached through faith and grace only, Luther criticized the corrupt practice of selling indulgences. c. Luther with his disappointment he wrote the 95 Theses and nailed a copy of his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church. d. The 95 Theses, which was the foundation of the Protestant Reformation e. Although the 95 Theses was a criticism of the church, it was written in a humble and academic tone, as Luther was a professor at a University. It questioned rather than blamed. f. The first two of the Theses contained Luther's main idea, that God in the Bible said that believers seek repentance and that faith alone, would lead to salvation. The other 93 theses, many were directly Luther's disappointment, criticizing the practice of indulgences, and some supported the first two. g. One of the most famous quotes of the 95 theses was when Luther discussed the construction of St. Peter's scandal. i. Why doesn't the pope, whose wealth today is greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build the basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers? h. Luther publicly declared that the Bible did not give the pope the most authority to interpret scripture and make up what they want, which was a direct attack on the authority of the church. i. With the help of the printing press, The 95 Theses were quickly distributed throughout Germany and then made their way to Rome. 5. Defending his own believing- Moral Courage 3 a. In 1518, Luther was called to Augsburg, a city in southern Germany, to defend his opinions before a church committee. A debate lasted three days between Luther and Cardinal Thomas Cajetan and it met no agreement. Cajetan defended the church's use of indulgences as reasonable, but Luther refused to recant his own writing. b. Around 1518 the pope condemned Luther's writings as conflicting with the teachings of the Church and put Luther on Excommunication. 6. Hero on Excommunication a. With the support from his friends to help him hide, Luther translated the New Testament into the German language, to give ordinary people the opportunity to read God's word. This took him ten years to complete. Section 1 cont. 7. Lutheran Church a. Though still under threat of arrest, Luther secretly returned to Wittenberg Castle Church, in Eisenach, in May 1522 to organize a new form of church, which will be known in the future as Lutheranism. b. He gained many followers, and the Lutheran Church also received considerable support from German princes. c. However, during the peasant revolt beginning in 1524, Luther went against the peasants and sided with the pope, whom he depended on to keep his church growing. Thousands of peasants were killed, but the Lutheran Church grew over the years. 8. Action that made him a controversial character- Anti-Semetism a. Later in his life, during his time as the dean of theology at University of Wittenberg. Luther suffered many illness, eg. heart problems and digestive disorders. The physical pain might reflect on his writing as his passage The Jews and Their Lies. In the writing Luther advocated for the

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abolishment of Jews from the country and condoned based on the excerpts of the Old Testament.
b. Luther died on February 18, 1546, at the age of 62 during a trip to his hometown

ENDNOTES

Acknowledgements. The interns in Module 1 worked very hard on this project with me. I am able to acknowledge only those with whom I worked especially closely but I am grateful for the assistance of all the interns in this module. (See Ethics Center website to view material on Module 1, including specific thanks to all interns.

¹ We use the terms Roman Catholic and Catholic interchangeably.

² From *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceeding Upon Impeachments for High Treason, etc* (London, 1719)

³ From the transcripts of the trial. “Before the actual trial began, the Duke of Norfolk offered him the King’s pardon if he would repent and revoke his “willful, obstinate opinion.” ³ More graciously declined the offer and simply expressed his hope that God would grant him the grace to maintain his “good, honest, and upright mind ... even to the last hour and extreme moment” of his life. ⁴ He prayed in this way because he was well aware of human frailty, and because he had long ago learned to distrust his own abilities in favor of God’s” ■

[https://www.thomasmorestudies.org//docs/The%20Trial%20of%20Thomas%20 More.pdf](https://www.thomasmorestudies.org//docs/The%20Trial%20of%20Thomas%20More.pdf) ❖

⁴ With special thanks to Steven Ma for his assistance in Martin Luther.