

Queering Martin Luther

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In contemporary culture, a narrative has taken hold which appears, at first blush, to be an apt tool in understanding the life and work of Martin Luther. This is the “coming out” story. Its name alludes to the metaphor of “coming out of the closet” which has been applied to gays and lesbians who choose to publicly declare their sexual preference. Given the sheer number of these narratives shared on the world wide web, it is clear that this has become a significant paradigm of self-understanding.¹ If we think of the emergence of Martin Luther’s theology as a coming out story, then we might tell it as the account of a young man labouring beneath the weight of a secret which, in order to be true to himself, he must reveal to the wider world. Precisely at the moment of revelation, there is relief from the secret’s burden, but a corresponding burden which arises from the public conflict which follows, for the revelation sets Luther in opposition to the most powerful authority of his day – Rome. However, queer theory challenges interpretations of this form. If we understand the life and work of Martin Luther as nothing more than a voice of opposition, then his life and work are conditioned by and restricted to the terms by which we understand the object of his opposition. There is no possibility of difference, no possibility of a true reformation. Instead, it may be more fruitful to set aside Martin Luther the reformer, the rebel, the revolutionary and replace it with a Martin Luther of difference. To that end, I shall

¹ For example: Gay/Lesbian Issues - Coming Out Stories Gallery, <http://www.rslevinson.com/gaylesissues/comingoutstories/blcoming.htm>; Internet; accessed 08 December, 2004; Outpath - Start Your Journey, <http://www.outpath.com/>; Internet; accessed 08 December, 2004; <http://www.comingoutstories.com/>; Internet; accessed 08 December, 2004; Coming Out Stories, <http://www.avert.org/comingoutstories.htm>; Internet; accessed 08 December, 2004.

proceed as follows: 1) to examine competing accounts of Martin Luther's "coming out"; 2) to introduce queer theory as it might apply to reformation theology; and 3) to revisit Luther's "coming out" (understood as a public declaration of his theology) in order to consider how queer theory might contribute to this discussion.

Martin Luther Comes Out

The following are well-known events (almost the stuff of legend) which may be viewed as formative in the spiritual and intellectual development of Martin Luther:

- 1) The thunderstorm – July 2, 1505. Luther was to study law at the university at Erfurt. On a journey there, following a visit to his parents, the twenty-one year old found himself caught in a thunderstorm and feared for his life. He called upon St. Anne for help and vowed that he would become a monk. On July 17, 1505, he entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt as a novice. Since Luther was alone at the time, this account comes solely from him via his table talk of July 16, 1539.
- 2) The fit in the choir. This account comes to us from three separate and "unfriendly" narratives. Although acknowledging its dubious sources, Erikson devotes an entire chapter to the event and proceeds on the assumption that it did, indeed, occur.² In his early twenties, while still in the monastery in Erfurt, Luther blurted out "I am not!" during a reading of Jesus healing the dumb man (Mark 9:17). Early detractors took this as evidence that Luther was possessed by the devil, but Erikson interprets it as evidence of unconscious conflict which played itself out

² Erik H. Erikson, Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1958), 22-43.

more visibly at Luther's first mass on May 2, 1507 in the presence of his father. Ozment summarizes the conflict thus:

Erikson speculates that Luther was here defending his decision to enter the monastery against his father's strong disapproval and his own subconscious feeling that he was not cut out for the religious life.³

3) The tower experience. Like the thunderstorm, this comes to us only from Luther, in this instance through his preface to the 1545 edition of his Latin works.⁴ There is dispute as to both location and date. Luther uses the word "cloaca" and much has been made of both literal and psychoanalytic interpretations of an anal translation with the suggestion that Luther had his insight in the latrine.⁵ The tower experience is associated with his insight drawn from Romans 1:17 which found its way into his writings of early 1513.⁶ Location and date aside, it is Luther's insight which is important: the concept of justification by faith alone as the germination of Luther's mature theology and, indeed, the theological justification for the Reformation.

4) The Ninety-five Theses – October 31, 1517. This calls to mind the iconic image of a humble monk nailing his writings to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg and upending all of western civilization as a result. However, legend and reality are probably at odds in this account. Historical orthodoxy points out that this was a customary academic practice and not at all revolutionary.⁷ By this account, an unknown person copied the Latin statements, translated them into German, then delivered them to a printer for wider distribution. Subsequent scholarship questions whether the *Ninety-five Theses* were, in fact, ever posted. Luther never mentioned the

³ Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform 1250-1550 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 228.

⁴ Ozment 229.

⁵ For example, Erikson 204-206.

⁶ Marilyn J. Harran, Luther on Conversion. The Early Years (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 175

⁷ For example, Roland Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 79.

incident in his table talk, and it may well have arisen from elaborations or exaggerations of Luther's colleague, Philipp Melanchthon. It is suggested, instead, that Luther first wrote an obsequious letter to the archbishop, Albrecht of Mainz, and then proposed the *Ninety-five Theses* as a strategy for provoking debate while avoiding personal responsibility for the assertions contained in the document.⁸ Even if not intended for general circulation, the *Ninety-Five Theses* became irretrievably public by August, 1518 when Luther published his *Explanations* of the *Ninety-five Theses*.

5) The Leipzig Debate – July 4-14, 1519. During the debate, Johann Eck extracted from Luther an admission that a papal council could err. Marius offers this gloss on the significance of Luther's admission:

Luther's renunciation not only of the Roman primacy but also of the authority of the general council is the great moment recorded by all biographers. Here was the fruition of Luther's years in the monastery, his inner anguish, and his lonely wrestling with scripture as a means of finding his own way to truth.⁹

With the Leipzig debate, Luther's theology was a matter of public record. Eck returned to Germany to post the papal bull (*Exsurge Domine*) dated June 20, 1520. On December 10, 1520, the final day of grace from the posting of the bull, the faculty and students of Wittenberg University burned various writings, and Luther himself burned *Exsurge Domine*.

6) The Diet of Worms – April 17, 1521. Begun on January 27, 1521, Luther was summoned to appear before the Imperial Diet in order to recant his errors. In the presence of Charles of Hapsburg, the new Holy Roman Emperor, he refused, and offered his famous statement which

⁸ Richard Marius, Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 137 ff.

⁹ Marius 179.

concluded with “I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.”¹⁰ Luther was given three weeks grace before imposition of the imperial ban which was subject capital punishment. He was fortunate to have the protection of Frederick, elector of Saxony.

7) Marriage – June 13, 1525. In 1525, Luther married Katherine von Bora, an apostate nun. Theological, intellectual and political differences with Rome were finally integrated with the choice he made in living his life from day to day. If he doubted the integrity of earthly institutions, he could console himself by asserting that such institutions were, after all, only managed by fallible humans. However, one may argue that, when Luther eschewed his vow of celibacy in favour of marriage, he stepped beyond those institutions which lie within the ambit of human authority. (Rome could hardly ban him a second time.) If Luther was wrong on the matter of marriage, then there was only one authority which remained, only one authority to whom he could be held accountable. And that was an authority which not even Luther was prepared to challenge. With marriage, Luther came out unequivocally.

As we consider these seven pivotal experiences in Luther’s life, we might place them upon a continuum stretching from a highly private youth to a uniquely public life in his later years – so public, in fact, that he daily dictated his thoughts at his kitchen table for all to inspect. The act of coming out may be viewed as an integration of private and public identities. The act has three defining elements: 1) an apprehension of the private self; 2) a public revelation of the private self; and 3) an assumption of responsibility for the act. In the twenty-first century, coming out is understood as a rite of passage for the assertion of identity as it relates to sexuality. However, sexuality is only one of many possible indicia. For example, many attach greater

¹⁰ In fact, the words “here I stand” were added later in a printed version. Nevertheless, this was the tenor of Luther’s speech. See Marius, 294.

importance to vocation or career, affiliation with a social, cultural or racial group, or unique or rare skill sets, as markers of personal identity. Many are unaware of the extent to which their identity is contingent upon their environment, unconsciously guarding their sense of self when in hostile surroundings, then allowing the hidden indicia to appear when in safer surroundings. Again, in the twenty-first century, we typically associate this shifting conduct with issues of sexual identity. The young lesbian behaves “straight” in the presence of her parents, whom she perceives as hostile, but is open about her sexual orientation while among peers. But she is out only when she deliberately advises her parents of her sexual orientation.

When, then, did Luther come out? First, it is import to declare, for the purposes of this examination, that we are not interested in issues of sexual identity; this is not a psycho-historical endeavor. We are concerned with Luther’s theological identity. How did Luther view himself in relation to God? And how, in turn, did that affect his relation to Church? On these terms of inquiry, the first candidate among pivotal experiences is the posting of Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses*. A cursory glance suggests that this was a public revelation which set Luther at odds with the principal authority of his day. However, it is not clear that the publication of the *Ninety-five Theses* was deliberate. As noted above, the practice of posting theses was a traditional method of inviting academic debate. The popular appeal of the theses was either accidental or orchestrated by others without Luther’s express permission. And so it cannot be said with certainty that Luther took personal responsibility for this dissemination of his views. Nor can his publication of his *Explanations* be viewed as anything more than a grudging acknowledgment that his *Ninety-five Theses* required what our culture would describe as “damage control” or “spin doctoring.” In addition, the *Ninety-five Theses* cannot be regarded as the declaration of a coherent and comprehensive theology. As its full title suggests (Disputation On The Power and

Efficacy Of Indulgences), it is a one-issue document, concerned principally with abuses related to the sacrament of penance and the indulgence trade. It is telling that Luther is said to have posted his *Ninety-five Theses* on the eve of All Saints' Day, when local people would have passed the church door in order to view the elector's collection of relics.¹¹

A more credible candidate for the occasion of Luther's coming out is the Leipzig debate. Thanks to Albrecht of Mainz, the *Ninety-five Theses* had reached Rome. In fact, the *Ninety-five Theses* may have been the principal motivation for a papal affirmation of November 9, 1518 that indulgences applied to purgatory.¹² Luther had explicitly requested to speak at Leipzig, although initially denied this right by Duke George of Saxony.¹³ This indicates that Luther was deliberate in his intention to publicly challenge papal authority. In addition, as comparisons were drawn between John Hus and Martin Luther, the obvious inference loomed that Luther might suffer the same penalty as Hus. Clearly, Luther understood the gravity of his situation. Thus, by the conclusion of the Leipzig debate, Luther had met the three criteria listed above; he had come out.

Queer Theory

By definition, queer theory cannot be defined. And yet, it is capable of sufficient definition to form the basis of university curriculum, and so it must be possible to say something about it. When one has difficulty providing a positive definition, it is tempting to define something by reference to those things which it is not. I shall return to this temptation later (*Exsurge Domine* is framed in Luther's terms). For now, I shall provide a provisional statement of dominant themes which can serve as a point of departure.

- 1) queer theory is not a body of opinion, but rather, an interpretive strategy;

¹¹ Marius 137; Bainton 79.

¹² Marius 172.

¹³ Marius 172.

- 2) queer theory eschews dyadic structures which consist of opposing categories;
- 3) instead, to the extent that the objects of its strategy can be understood as “texts,” such texts support innumerable readings, none of which can claim to be definitive;
- 4) queer theory seeks to identify the locus of power/knowledge and then to demonstrate how all that arises from this locus is constructed (rather than received from an immutable source);¹⁴
- 5) the chief tool we use in constructing our systems of power/knowledge is language;
- 6) as the foundation of conversation, language (and the meanings we ascribe to it) never determines conversation; discourse remains open; attempts to close it merely signal the arbitrary exercise of power.

Queer theory acknowledges its parentage in the writings of Michel Foucault, in particular, his *History of Sexuality*. From the title of his work, there is the possibility that he speaks as much to history as he does to sexuality. This is confirmed in his introduction as he presents his doubts concerning an orthodox account (of the emergence of a repressive attitude toward sexuality within western culture). He asks: “is [repression] not in fact part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces[?]”¹⁵ This hints at the answer to one of two skepticisms: how can one plausibly introduce into an historical inquiry a discipline ostensibly devoted to questions of sexual and gender identity? Foucault’s answer is that it is legitimate (perhaps even necessary) to approach issues of sexual and gender identity through the lens of history. Conversely, it is legitimate to approach historical issues through the lens of sexual and

¹⁴ “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. ... Their [power relationships’] existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: ... by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.” Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1:95 – 96.

¹⁵ Foucault 10.

gender identity. The two are not opposite; they are mutually apposite. This is made clearer in reference to the second skepticism: even if we introduce sexual and gender identity into the inquiry, how fruitful can such a pursuit prove? This resembles the criticisms leveled at Erikson in response to his psycho-historical account of Luther's emerging identity as a young man. For example, after surveying Erickson's study, Steven Ozment writes: "I believe this latter conclusion [about young Luther's character] ... is far better understood and more plausibly explained by a grasp of the religious culture and theology of the Middle Ages than by the importation of the findings of clinical psychology into the sixteenth century."¹⁶ Or, more bluntly: "Luther was simply not a modern man and cannot be measured by Freudian or other psychological insights."¹⁷ Perhaps Foucault would agree with Ozment's conclusion, but he would not dismiss the relevance of (sexual) identity issues in an historical investigation. Instead, he might begin by examining the way in which we deploy discourse in the construction of identity in our own milieu. By bringing to the conversation an understanding of the contingent nature of our own identity, we may better recognize, in the behaviour of those who lived five hundred years ago, a different discourse (or a discourse of difference?), directed to precisely the same end – the construction of identity.

By way of illustration, commentators note both the openness and frequency of Luther's vulgarity, in both correspondence and his table talk. For example, in his letter to Albrecht of Mainz accompanying the *Ninety-five Theses*, he refers to himself as "a little shit of a man."¹⁸ Erickson likewise draws attention to anal concerns in discussing Luther's conflation of prayer

¹⁶ Ozment 231.

¹⁷ Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin – God's Court Jester* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 151.

¹⁸ Marius 139.

and swearing.¹⁹ Luther speaks about nocturnal emissions and “solitary emissions” while cloistered, and then about touching specific parts of Katie’s body when tempted by the devil.²⁰ While discussing Luther’s sexuality, Erikson makes this remarkable statement: “Luther later, at times naïvely, at times shrewdly, was frank about his sex-life, revealing different aspects of the matter out of mere impulsivity or his peculiar sense of publicity.”²¹ In one sentence, Luther is variously naïve, shrewd, frank, impulsive and an exhibitionist. Nowhere is Erikson more vulnerable, for it is not clear that any of these descriptions can automatically be associated with the sexuality of a man who lived five hundred years ago. These descriptions fit properly within a fictional account of a man named Martin Luther whom Erickson writes into being. We can engage Foucault to guide us in a different approach to Luther. Foucault introduces his study of sexuality with a narrative that places the advent of western sexual repression in the seventeenth century “after hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression”²² A medieval monk who broke his vows of celibacy thought about sex differently because his thoughts were mediated by a discourse which was different. And so, if we are to be historically honest, we must state clearly our hermeneutic strategy. Are we seeking to understand Luther’s *sitz im leben* the better to empathize with a man so positioned, as historical orthodoxy might demand? Or are we conducting a post-structuralist post-mortem on Lutheran theology? Perhaps, when we evaluate the historical Luther while (unconsciously) adopting the modern discourse of

¹⁹ “We must conclude, that Luther’s use of repudiative and anal patterns was an attempt to find a safety-valve when unrelenting inner pressure threatened to make devotion unbearable and sublimity hateful ... “ Erikson, 247.

²⁰ See Erikson, 158 – 163, for a discussion of Luther’s concepts of sex.

²¹ Erikson 159.

²² Foucault 5. It should be noted that Foucault rejects this narrative. However, he rejects its claim that sexual repression arose with modernism. He uses this narrative as a foil to describe modern sexual repression as a discursive event, but he does not reject the date of this event.

psychoanalysis, or political theory,²³ or broad geographical trends²⁴, we valorize discourse over Luther. If, instead, we approach Luther, the text, while continually holding in consciousness the question – how do **I** read Luther? (instead of how do I read **Luther**?) – then our inquiry no longer depends upon the expectation that Luther will somehow reveal himself in his text. We do not direct our attention to Luther’s text, because Luther is the text, and the responsibility rests with us, not Luther, to write this text. Revisiting Erikson’s reading of the Luther text, we can answer: yes, Luther was naïve, shrewd, frank, impulsive and an exhibitionist, but he is much more besides!

In queer theory, the coming out story is only the beginning. Typically, the coming out story opens in the form of a declaration of difference. For example, a gay man might publicly announce to a hetero-normative world his aberrant sexual preference. This produces a dyadic structure which places two understandings of sexuality in opposition to one another. One is figured as the privileged identity from which the other has strayed, and in relation to which the other defines itself, and therefore, upon which the other is wholly dependent. One challenge to the hetero-homo binary system is the presence of individuals who claim identities outside this system. For example, bisexuals do not fit easily within this structure.²⁵ Heterosexuals tend to group bisexuals together with homosexuals, whereas homosexuals typically reject this association. Since the rise of the HIV/AIDS crisis, bisexuals (especially bisexual males) have

²³ For example, Friedrich Engels portrays the reformation as the inevitable consequence of class struggle throughout late medieval Europe. Friedrich Engels, The German Revolutions, ed. Leonard Krieger, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

²⁴ For example, Jared Diamond’s perspective on reformation Europe is positively stratospheric. Individual behaviour shrinks to nothing beside the global sweep of factors such as continental axes, climate, and epidemiology. Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs, and Steel (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1997).

²⁵ For an excellent discussion of queer theory and the challenge posed by bisexuality, see Erich Steinman, “Interpreting the Invisibility of Male Bisexuality” in Bisexuality in the Lives of Men, Brett Beemyn and Erich Steinman, eds., (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2001).

been stigmatized by both heterosexuals and homosexuals.²⁶ In the gay and lesbian context, the securing of “rights”²⁷ formerly accorded to heterosexuals has created communities which privilege the homo-normative and treat bisexuality as its binary opposite. However, it seems forced when one tries to place bisexuality within a dyadic structure. Queer theory offers bisexuality a way out of these restrictions. It does so by challenging the assumption that heteronormativity is a stable concept, and proceeds by demonstrating, in the manner of Foucault, the many ways in which the heterosexual privilege is historically and socially contingent.²⁸

Although queer theory seems stuck, for the time being, in the rut of sexuality, nevertheless its strategies are valid in other areas of the human experience. And so I shall turn now to Luther’s theological struggles.

Queering Martin Luther

As with queer theory generally, we cannot rest with Martin Luther’s coming out at the Leipzig debate. If this were the end of our discussion, then we would have consigned Luther to a binary system: the privileged papal authority and a rebellious German monk. However, there is ample evidence which undermines such a structure. I wish to limit my discussion to only one of many tools which may be used in order to entrench the position of privilege – language.

²⁶ I have personal familiarity with this stigmatization. My cousin, Shannon McMartin, succumbed to AIDS in 1995 after contact with a bisexual male whom she believed to be a monogamous heterosexual.

²⁷ The latest “coup” is the December 9th, 2004 Supreme Court of Canada decision which 1) confirms that Parliament has exclusive legislative capacity to enact laws governing same-sex civil unions and 2) declares that same-sex marriage is consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Reference re Same-Sex Marriage, 2004 SCC 79. Reasons available from <http://www.lexum.umontreal.ca/csc-scc/en/rec/html/2004scc079.wpd.html>; Internet; accessed December 10, 2004.

²⁸ Nikki Sullivan, “Queering ‘Straight’ Sex,” in A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

It may be argued that Luther had won the Leipzig debate before he ever uttered a word, for it was Luther, and not Rome, who controlled the parameters of discourse. It is revealing to examine the language of the important documents which precede the debate, the documents which establish the binary relationship between Luther and Rome. First, consider his *Ninety-five Theses*. Why, we might ask, did Luther choose to deliver his concerns regarding the abuse of indulgences in the form of a disputation? Instead, why not correspondence? Why not the text of a lecture or a sermon? Immediate answers come to mind: this was the generally accepted procedure for monks of Luther's status (i.e. this was the only form available); or, as mentioned above, this allowed him to avoid personal responsibility for his controversial questions. Whatever the answer, the form itself merits our attention. These are terse, epigrammatic sentences and, as Marius suggests, "[t]hey have the look of ideas dashed off to vent his spleen."²⁹ In addition, they are stated as positive assertions and strike directly to the heart of the matter. For example:

14. The imperfect health [of soul], that is to say, the imperfect love, of the dying brings with it, of necessity, great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear.
15. This fear and horror is sufficient of itself alone (to say nothing of other things) to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.³⁰

The papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, responds with:

²⁹ Marius 140.

³⁰ Martin Luther, *Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Adolph Spaeth, L. D. Reed and Henry Eyster Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 32.

Some of these errors [of Luther] we have decided to include in the present document; their substance is as follows:

...

4. To one on the point of death imperfect charity necessarily brings with it great fear, which in itself alone is enough to produce the punishment of purgatory, and impedes entrance into the kingdom.³¹

By reiterating Luther's alleged errors, the pope tacitly validates them by confirming the mode by which Luther has chosen to deliver them. At the level of discursive practice, the pope did not speak from a privileged position, and Luther cannot be interpreted as an oppressed "other" who stood in opposition to papal authority. To the extent that conversation determines power, Luther was the master and the pope, his servant.

At Leipzig, we again witness Luther attempting to assert control over the conversation. Biographers make much of the fact that on the morning of July 7, 1519, Luther asked to switch from Latin to German so that he could speak to the "common people" about the debate.³² As any good American defense counsel knows, winning a case on erudite points of law is useless if you do not also win the jury's confidence. Luther knew who his real adjudicators were, and he knew that in order to win their support, he must speak their language - both literally, and in the colloquial sense of speaking in terms that they could understand.

On the other side of the floor, if Johann Eck was to secure evidence sufficient to warrant a papal ban, then he would have to force Luther to commit heresy. He tried to achieve this first, by associating Luther with the writings of John Hus, and second, by extracting an admission that both a pope and a papal council could err. Ultimately, Luther obliged Eck on both counts. Thus,

³¹ Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther, Exsurge Domine, Bull of Pope Leo X issued June 15, 1520; available from <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo10/110exdom.htm>; Internet; accessed December 10, 2004.

³² Bainton 116 – 117; Marius 180.

Luther clearly articulated a position which set him apart from the Roman church. He made this emphatically so when he declared at the Diet of Worms: “[H]ere I stand.” This resembles the experience of those who live on the margins of hetero-normativity. In a discussion of community, Nikki Sullivan describes the experience of pressure “to choose a single identity and thus to suppress any sense of difference that may be regarded as a potential breach of commonality.”³³ Eck maneuvered Luther into an either/or position: either he acknowledge the supremacy of Rome and live in community, or accept responsibility for his claims and be banned. The terms of the debate offered no middle ground, nor any place outside this binary opposition.³⁴

Historians report, and we accept as common knowledge, that Luther chose to accept responsibility for his claims and be banned by Rome. However, a queer reading of Luther reveals other meanings which may be ascribed to Luther’s choice. I offer one such reading and, in the spirit of queer reading, I explicitly repudiate any suggestion that my reading is at all definitive or in any way concludes debate upon the matter. In discussing the act of coming out, we described it as an assertion of identity which integrates both the interior and exterior, the private and public, the spiritual and physical ways of being in the world. Such an integration denies the legitimacy of either/or. Whole people must incorporate both/and. Historians report that following the Diet of Worms, Luther fell under an imperial ban. This is a claim about Luther’s exterior life. But to suggest that Luther chose this for himself imputes to him a particular state of mind, and this is something to which we have no access. It is just as plausible that he could have fallen under the imperial ban, outwardly comporting himself as he did, yet with an entirely different state of mind. Perhaps he refused to make a choice. Perhaps he was

³³ Sullivan 138 – 9.

³⁴ Ironically, a strict adherence to Luther’s *sola scriptura* might easily lead to a justification of Eck’s demands: “Whoever is not with me is against me ... “ (Matt 12:30).

paralyzed by fear. Or perhaps ... perhaps he made a queer choice. Perhaps he denied the legitimacy of Eck's demand. Recall that the words "here I stand" were added to the German publication of proceedings from the Diet of Worms. There is little evidence that Luther uttered these words. This opens the door to the possibility that Luther, at least initially, envisioned himself as reflecting upon the authority of Rome in much the same way as a child reflects upon the authority of a parent. (Erikson had much to say, in a literal sense, about the parental relationship in his account.) Despite doubts and arguments and anger, the relationship persists. Certainly this vision accords with Luther's theology of grace. But whatever Luther's interpretation of the Gospel as an assurance of grace, Rome failed to meet his expectations as a loving parent.

Conclusion

I have endeavored to engage a queer reading of Martin Luther at two points. The first considers how Luther might read Luther. It is possible to ascribe to Luther a queer view of his relationship to the church in Rome. He did not think of his theological development as arising in opposition to Rome; the oppositional framework – the debate – only assumed a binary structure when he was pressured to conform to Catholic orthodoxy. Certainly, in his youth he bears all the markings of a devout catholic intellectual - the classical education, entry into the Augustinian order, strict adherence to the rigors of monastic life, especially the confessional. Nevertheless, there is little in Luther's teachings that is not rooted firmly in this orthodoxy. For example, long after his break with Rome, he chose to convey his theological precepts to the laity through the (very Roman) form of the catechism.

The second point of engagement considers how we might read Luther. This strategy begins with introspection – an examination of all the mental habits that seemingly compel us to cloak Luther in the metaphors of war and of revolution. But metaphors are as much the tool of the rhetorician as of the teacher, and their linguistic tug can easily draw us to conclusions that are persuasive only on their own terms. For example, is Luther merely a leading voice of the corrupt bourgeoisie, as Engels portrays him, hanging ambivalently between an oppressed working class and self-serving political and religious rulers? Or can we read his ambivalence queerly, as arising from the nuanced perceptions of a brilliant theologian? This question should not be answered; but it deserves to be discussed.