Martin Luther as a youth.
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A paper presented at The Salvation Army Europe Zone’s Luther 500 Symposium, Luther Hotel, Wittenberg, 15-19 October 2017.

Introduction

Martin Luther - a loyal son of Catholicism who later in life would shatter the structures of the medieval church. At first, a devoted servant of the pope, the same pope he would later refer to as the “amit of Christ”.

Historians mostly agree that the pope of the renaissance was a frivolous, sensual, magnificent and unscrupulous man and with him the church. The idea of rebelling against this church was like a rebellion against one’s own mind because of the strict influence it had over people’s lives. Martin Luther became a rebellious and controversial figure, but he was, above all else, a man of religion, a man always looking for God.

Early childhood

Martin Luther was born on the 10th of November in 1483 in the town of Eisleben. He was the first child of Hans Luther, a farmer's son who turned his back on the land and became a copper miner, and Margareta Luther (Lindemann), who came from a small but educated and well-off family.

Martin Luther’s parents were good catholic Christians and the day after he was born, they baptised him and he was given the name of the Saint Martin of Tours, who was a founder of Maius Monasterium in France and later Bishop of Tours.

The 11 of November was the day of St Martin of Tours. When he was one year old, the family moved to the town of Magdenburg where they managed to work their way from poverty to a good and respectable standing. (Astås, 1984)

Martin Luther’s childhood was characterised by his parents’ strict Christian beliefs and sober lifestyle. His mother would often discipline him and his siblings and Luther recalled once, "(that) for the sake of stealing a nut, my mother once beat me until
the blood flowed”. Luther had the utmost respect for his father and they shared a good relationship but Luther has also referred to his father’s punishments, “my father once whipped me so hard I ran away - I hated him until he finally managed to win me back”.

This form of strict parenting was not unusual for its time and there are many testimonies to his parents referring to him in tenderness and with high esteem. They saw a brilliant boy and their hopes for him were great. (Bainton, 1050)

Even in education, punishment and strict discipline was the rule. In addition, at the age of seven, Luther started his education at the local Latin school where according to himself, there were frequent disciplinary actions, but despite this, he had a relatively happy time at school. (Astås, 1984) The entire training of young men at the time both at home and at school was designed to install fear of God and reverence for the church. He was raised in a Christian faith with a legal basis where the profit thought and sight of a demanding God and judgemental Christ were prominent. There is no evidence that Luther rebelled against this upbringing, the only thing that set him apart was that he was extraordinary sensitive and had recurrent periods of exaltation and depression. (Bainton, 1950)

Already as a youth, he was exposed to different religious trends of the time. In Magdenburg, where he continued his education after Latin school, he was exposed to the “devotion moderna” religion that was a movement for religious reform, calling for apostolic renewal through the rediscovery of genuine pious practices such as humility, obedience and simplicity of life. It began in the late fourteenth-century, largely through the work of Gerard Groote, and flourished in the Low Countries and Germany in the fifteenth century, but came to an end with the Protestant Reformation. In Eisenacht, he was exposed to the renaissance culture. (Haraldsø, 1988)

The University years

After ten years of basic education, Martin Luther got a place at the well-known university in Erfurt. This was one of the best academic institutions of the time and because of his parents' standing and financial freedom, he was able to go there. Martin Luther was devoted to his studies and excelled at university and he finished his bachelor of the arts and master of philosophy in only four years. In addition to his academic studies, he was proficient on the lute. His father wanted him to pursue a career in law, to enable him to become part of the establishment. Martin Luther started to study law, but he was suffering from depression but he also had wonderings and thoughts about faith and religion. (Astås, 1984) The university in Erfurt was very much influenced by the Ochamismic philosophy that clearly stated a divide between faith and reason, and that faith cannot be achieved by speculations, but only by the apparent truth, something Luther would both experience and still battle with later in life. (Haraldsø, 1988)

When lighting strikes

In the early 1500’s Martin Luther was studying law, but at that time he experienced some personal losses. The plague had come to Germany, two of his younger brothers died, and there were reports (that turned out to be wrong) that Luther himself had succumbed to the disease. He was also in the spring of 1505 struggling with a deep depression. While walking back to University, after a trip home to see his parents, Martin Luther was struck by lightning. It had a profound impact on him and shouted
out “Hilf du, Helage Anna, ich will einMoch werden”, “Help me Holy Anna (the patron of miners) I will become a monk”.

Because of his promise to God was given when afraid for his life, some of his friends meant that it was not binding, but Luther was determined. The episode had made his calling and purpose clear to him. However, there are theories that this was a result of the Christian understanding he was brought up with, that after a meeting with the almighty God, he demands this sacrifice in order to save his soul. Therefore, with his parent’s reluctant approval, Martin Luther went to the steps of the Augustine monastery in Erfort to ask to become part of the order on the 17 of July in 1505.

Bibliography

