

# AColyte

October 31, 2017

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things  
at Austin College



# Trick or Treat?

AColyte

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

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## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Comfortably Ensnared Among My History Books  
Thinking about Paul McCartney and the "Wings Over America" Album  
In My Little Corner of the Chapel  
October 31, 2017

*Someone's knocking at the door;  
Somebody's ringing the bell  
Someone's knocking at the door;  
Somebody's ringing the bell  
Do me a Favor:  
Open the door and let 'em in.*

*Sister Suzie, brother John  
Martin Luther, Phil and Don  
Brother Michael, Auntie Gin  
Open the door and let 'em in  
--Paul McCartney, "Let 'Em In"*

It was the early 1500s and Pope Leo wanted to build a big, glorious, badass church in Rome.

He needed money to do it. Lots of money.

So he sent representatives to churches all over Europe to raise funds for his grand construction project.

There's nothing particularly unusual about that so far.

Churches need buildings and buildings cost money.

But in his eagerness to raise the massive amounts of money he needed to build his big, glorious, badass church, Pope Leo and his advisers developed some...um... let's say *innovative* fundraising strategies.

He instructed his fundraisers to tell folks in the local congregations they visited that if they donated enough money to the big, glorious, badass church project their sins would be forgiven and they would have to face less punishment after they died before they got to heaven.

These monetary payments to the Church to buy forgiveness of sins were called "indulgences." The notion was that if you gave enough money to the Church for the

big construction project, God would recognize your generosity as faithfulness and decide not to punish you – and maybe not to punish your family or friends – for all of the sins that you or they were clearly guilty of.

Indulgences were kind of like “Get Out of Purgatory Free” cards.

Around the Church, some people were uncomfortable with that fundraising strategy.

Martin Luther was one of those people.

Luther thought the whole “indulgences” business was fake theology.

He read his Bible, especially Romans 3:23-24 (*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by [God’s] grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*) and noted that there was nothing in there about economic transactions.

Luther didn’t think the Church could just sell God’s forgiveness.

In 1517, when Johann Tetzel came to Wittenberg, Germany – where Luther lived and taught Philosophy – and started talking about indulgences, Luther decided that he wanted to have a big public conversation about all this.

It was 500 years ago today – October 31, 1517 – when Luther proposed that big public conversation. He called it a “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” and he listed 95 questions or proposed discussion topics, “theses,” in the flyer that he posted.

I could go on and on about what happened next, but this is not the place for that.

Lots of us are geeking out about Martin Luther today because he questioned the policies of the Church hierarchy.

By the way, it’s important to understand that Luther’s objection was to the theology and actions of the Roman Catholic Church *in the 1500s*. The contemporary Roman Catholic Church is much different from the Church to which Luther directed his objections. As far as I know, no Roman Catholic today believes in indulgences.

Luther’s criticism and rejection of the positions and policies of the Church of his day were significant and had long-lasting effects.

He didn't just roll over and meekly acquiesce.

He didn't simply swallow what The Man tried to feed him.

He read.

He thought.

He questioned.

And he spoke up.

He protested.

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My daughter's roommate has a coffee mug that says "Tears of the Patriarchy."



I like that and I think I know it means.

As far as I can tell that mug is intended to be a somewhat humorous reference to collecting the tears of anguish shed by an exclusive, male-dominated, monolithic social order after it has been forced in some way to give up its illegitimate, unjust, and stifling control over individuals whose lives it has tried to manipulate and marginalize.

To my mind, the "patriarchy" is what suggests to girls that there are limits to what they can do or be.

And then the "patriarchy" is what pays women less than men for doing the same work, just to be sure they get the point.

I think the joke of the coffee mug is essentially that the patriarchy sheds tears whenever it is forced to include individuals, or ideas, or voices that it has tried, often successfully, to diminish or exclude.

I can get behind that.

I like the "Tears of the Patriarchy" coffee mug because it promotes resistance to the forces in the world that seek to concentrate power in the hands of the few and to silence, ignore, devalue, oppress, or marginalize others.

In Luke 10:19 Jesus says,

*I have given you authority to tread upon scorpions and snakes.*

“Scorpions” hurt people.

“Snakes” scare people.

Things that hurt or scare people diminish them.

I think what Jesus is essentially saying in Luke 19:10 is:

*I have given you authority to contend against the things that diminish people.*

Maybe even:

*I have given you authority to make the patriarchy cry.*

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So, today, some of us in my tribe are geeking out a little about Martin Luther.

And – whether you are Protestant or Catholic, non-Christian or non-religious –

- if you think there are still things in our culture that need to be reformed;
- if you think there is still value in protesting against pretentious and powerful forces that try to misdirect and manipulate important conversations;
- if you’re not necessarily ready to swallow everything The Man tries to feed you –

then I invite you to spare a good thought today for Martin Luther, an obnoxious Augustinian monk who poked the patriarchy in the eye with a great big stick 500 years ago today.



Until next time, I remain,

Just Another Cowboy Preacher,

Fully Aware of the Irony of a Middle-Aged White Man Writing this Piece,

But also proudly wearing my Martin Luther socks,

JOHN WILLIAMS

Chaplain

*Meanwhile, at our little Church-Related College out here on the edge of the herd, we have this from the Catholic Students Association:*

In Remembrance of  
the Faithful Departed



What? Bring a picture of a loved one who has passed away and place it in the small chapel! The Catholic Students Association would love to pray for them!

When? Saturday Oct. 28 – Thursday Nov. 2

Where? Small Chapel Stage



*The Catholic Students Association will meet in the Small Chapel at 7 p.m. on Thursday November 2 to offer prayers for those who have died in the last year.*

