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Martin Luther, Catholicism and the Practice of Sodomy

by Ian Brown

Is it true that Martin Luther, in his denunciations of the Roman Catholic Church, **claimed that Popes and priests commonly practised sodomy?**

Absolutely.

In fact, Luther's statements on this subject made John the Baptist's accusation against Herod's adultery seem trivial compared to the corruption among the Roman clergy. The words by which he accused the Roman clergy of practising sodomy are these:

"I am not lying to you. Whoever has been in Rome knows that conditions are unfortunately worse there than anyone can say or believe. When the last Lateran council was to be concluded in Rome under Pope Leo, among other articles it was decreed that one must believe the soul to be immortal. From this one may gather that they make eternal life an object of sheer mockery and contempt. In this way they confess that it is a common belief among them that there is no eternal life, but that they now wish to proclaim this by means of a bull.

More remarkable yet, in the same bull they decided that a cardinal should not keep as many boys in the future. However, Pope Leo commanded that this be deleted; otherwise it would have been spread throughout the whole world **how openly and shamelessly the pope and the cardinals in Rome practice sodomy.** I do not wish to mention the pope, but since the knaves will not repent, but condemn the gospel, blaspheme and revile God's word, and excuse their vices, they, in turn, will have to take a whiff of their own terrible filth. **This vice is so prevalent among them** that recently a pope caused his own death by means of this sin and vice. In fact, he died on the spot. All right now, you popes, cardinals, papists, spiritual lords, keep on persecuting God's word and defending your doctrine and your churches!

No pope, cardinal, bishop, doctor, priest, monk, or nun will condemn such an obviously disgraceful life; rather they laugh about it, excuse it, and gloss over it. They incite kings, princes, country, and people to defend such knaves with life and property, with land and people, and faithfully to protect them so that such vices might not be repented of and reformed, but rather strengthened, sanctioned, and approved. Now you are to hazard blood, body, and life just for the sake of saddling your neck and conscience with this.

I could easily mention more examples of such abominations, but it is too shameful; I fear that our German soil would have to tremble before it. But if an impudent popish ass should come along and dispute this, he will find me ready to do him battle, and it will be quite a battle!" (Luther's Works Volume 47, p.38)

In What Luther Says: An Anthology, Ewald Martin Plans provides this quote from the Reformer:

"The vice of the Sodomites is an unparalleled enormity. It departs from the natural passion and desire, planted into nature by God, according to which the male has a passionate desire for the female. Sodomy craves what is entirely contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversion? Without a doubt it comes from the devil. After a man has once turned aside from the fear of God, the devil puts such great pressure upon his nature that he extinguishes the fire of natural desire and stirs up another, which is contrary to nature."

It appears that Luther identified as one reason for this vile practice the forced abstinence that the priests and Pope had to bear:

"There Is Danger in Avoiding Marriage.

29 May, 1539. Thereupon there was conversation about the delightful institution of marriage.



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[Martin Luther said,] "Through the papists Satan so defiled it that in his little book on the celibacy of priests Cyprian wrote, 'If you hear a woman speak, flee from her as if she were a hissing snake.' That's the way it is. When one is afraid of whores one must fall into sodomite depravity, as almost happened to St. Jerome." (Luther's Works Volume 54, p.357)

[In case someone misinterprets this quote from Luther, Martin Luther preached fiercely against prostitution and ordered the brothels closed].

Helmut Puff's book, 'Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400-1600,' turns the spotlight on Roman Catholicism and Sodomy.

For a long time it was the "unspeakable sin," but when it was discussed in Reformation discourse, it took on a variety of names. Terms used to describe male same-sex sexual acts in late medieval southern Germany and Switzerland included:

- sodomy (sodomia),
- sinning "against nature" (contra naturam or wider die nature),
- heresy (ketzerei) – the concept of sodomy was originally defined as sexual "heresy,"
- and florencing (florezen): the reason the name of Florence became attached to this sin was during the Renaissance / Reformation, Florence developed a reputation for being pervaded with sodomy.

Chapter Six of Puff's book outlines how German humanists highlighted the practice of sodomy as something by which they could differentiate themselves from their Italian counterparts and how this created a "geography of perversion."

Chapter Seven describes how civic authorities and Reform-minded theologians, including Martin Luther, utilised the term "sodomy" during the Reformation to contrast their reforms with "sodomite activities" of the Catholic, and Italian, Church. This brought the "unspeakable sin" fully into the theatre of discussion.

Chapter Eight suggests how this contrast pushed Protestant reformers to advocate marriage as the only acceptable sexual norm for all, including clergy, since "celebration of marriage as well as sodomophobia were particularly successful as Protestant rallying points because both accorded with and could be mapped onto values held by communities before the Reformation" (p.176).

500 YEARS ON ...

However, 500 years on, is it a case of '**old habits dying hard**'?

'Slate' reported on 28 June 2017 how, "An Australian court charged a powerful cardinal in Rome with the crime of "historic sex offenses" Thursday (local time), making the chief financial adviser to Pope Francis—and No. 3 in the church hierarchy—the highest-ranking Vatican official ever to be charged for sexual abuse. The allegations against 76-year-old Cardinal George Pell date back decades to his time as a priest and then archbishop in Australia.

'Allegations raised in the past 18 months include that he assaulted boys at a Ballarat pool in the 1970s and allegations of assault at St Patrick's cathedral in Melbourne, when he was archbishop,' according to the Australian. 'Cardinal Pell was a parish priest in the Diocese of Ballarat, where he launched his extraordinary career. However, the diocese was riddled with hundreds and possibly thousands of cases of abuse in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.'

While this Rome-based Cardinal has maintained his innocence during the Australian government's investigation of widespread sexual abuse by the Catholic Church, **he himself admitted to a Commission which found "shocking levels of abuse in Australia's Catholic Church"** that the Catholic Church had made



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"enormous mistakes" in allowing thousands of children to be raped and molested by priests. He conceded that he, too, had erred by often believing the priests over victims who alleged abuse. And he vowed to help end a rash of suicides that has plagued church abuse victims in his Australian hometown of Ballarat.

Add to these allegations the quote from a reliable senior member of the Roman Curia in which he alleges that **the extent of homosexual practice in the Vatican has "never been worse" than now**. The same source confirmed the story about the gay and drug parties of Cardinal Coccopalmerio's secretary.