

In could legitimately be said of Martin Luther that he not only brought about the protestant reformation, but that he also almost single handedly ushered in the world as we know it today. Unfortunately, it could also be theorized that Luther played a large role in not only the Holocaust of World War II, but also in the continued persecution of the Jewish peoples today in Western Europe and the United States. It is hard for one to fathom that someone that did so much for the freedom of the commoner, could have simultaneously harbored such a hatred for a people; and what makes it all the more vexing is that fact that the people that he directed his hatred towards are clearly the chosen ones of the Lord that he professed to serve.

Luther's words and actions had a profound impact on the history of the world as we know it today, on both fronts. And how can one reconcile the one with the other? What does the bottom line on the balance sheet look like? Are we to think of Luther as the good and honorable man that helped to bring about modernity as we know it today? Or shall we remember him as a bitter, and confused little man that fanned a flame that's been a scourge of a people?

It would be hard for us to imagine today that at some distant point in our past that we could be tortured or put to death because we had ideas different that those held by a central authority – or that a “tithe” could be forcibly taken from us – or that the church could dictate our every waking moment; but that was indeed the world that existed in Europe prior to the protestant reformation. Martin Luther was born into this world of pain and darkness. He was born into this world of desolation, oppression, disease, suffering and death in the 15th century, and he lived a life wracked with guilt imposed upon him by his parents and his environment. But out of this pit of despair, rose the man that offered up his “95 theses”, and in so doing changed the face of the world. When Luther posted his theses on the doors of the church, he could not have even dreamed that it would be the spark that would ignite the flames of revolution.

But indeed it was! And it was a revolution that not only ripped absolute control from the church, but brought about a freedom of religion, politics, and more importantly thought, that has shaped almost all aspects of western life since then. It would be a safe speculation that had not the Protestant reformation came about, that we very well may not be Americans today – and most certainly not what WE think of as Americans. In a very real and

tangible way, we owe a debt of gratitude to Martin Luther for setting into motion the events that would eventually lead to the kind of language used by our founding fathers in the Declaration of Independence – for their insights on religious freedom, individual rights, and the need for protection from central control. So how is it that someone that did so much, for so many also have stoked such a baleful fire in his heart?

Luther professed to be a man of the Bible, and the Bible was where he cited the evidence that started the reformation. And yet there is *nothing* in the Bible (in context) to support his hatred of the Jewish people. One could speculate that he was already so blinded by his hatred of the Jew, that he simply saw what he expected or wanted to see. In all honesty though, it is simply so far beyond my understanding that I am at a complete loss even for speculation. For someone with such a profound influence on history, how different might things be today had he embraced the Jewish people, instead of despising them. Hitler would have had one less thing to latch onto in his campaign to exterminate Semitic peoples. Dare one say that Hitler may not have even had sufficient support to ever rise to power to begin with sans the endorsement of Luther? And how many woefully ignorant, or perhaps illiterate “Christians” would be without prejudice against the Jew were it not for Luther’s slashing words against them?

Martin Luther has absolutely had a profound impact, not only on medieval civilization, but an impact that can be felt and seen all around us even today. Luther has helped to shape the world as we know it...for better...*and* for worse. And again, how does one reconcile the two that are in such dire opposition to one another? Simply stated, we can not. We should be grateful for, and embracing of, the modern freedoms that can be traced back to Luther; and keeping in mind that Luther was after all, just a fallible man, we should eradicate that which he helped to bring forward that is so utterly evil in nature.