

The 96th Thesis

When only males are present, it is still permissible, to remove the embargo on the fundamental sigh. – Mark Twain

Most people do not know about the 96th Thesis of Martin Luther. Yes, it went unheralded, but there it was, plainly written, for all to read: *Away then, with the prohibition against the 'Devil's Weed.'* *Just as the pope justly thunders against those who by any means whatever contrive harm to the sale of indulgences, he unjustly bans the use of hops in the making of beer, sinfully favoring the wine of our Holy Communion over the daily needs of our people.* Footnotes go on: *As does our Lord's Prayer ask, 'Give us our daily bread,' we hereby implore, 'Give us our daily hop-flavored pint, or more, all that is needed to quench Satanic thirst.'*

Luther was right to include the 96th. Although the other 95 theses caused a great schism in the Church, and decades of wars and death and terrible destruction, no one protested against the sensible addition of a flower to preserve the brew and enhance the flavor of beer, even if it represented the first legalization of cannabis – yes *Humulus lupulus* (earth's little devil) is in the hemp family *Cannabaceae*. Beer drinkers are not the dreaded potheads of our homeless camps; they are simply happy, hoppy hopheads. And yes, with a controlled cultivation this beneficial plant was not the Devil's vine that strangled saplings. Of course, all this occurred prior to the invention of the hop-heavy India Pale Ale.

Martin had a huge problem – flatulence. Simply put, he was a prodigious beer drinker, and he farted a lot. From the fermentation. It did not help that he was “corpulent, double-chinned and stout...his bulk, his digestion, his anality...was linked to his character, his views of the devil, and the emerging identity of Lutheranism.”¹ Unabashedly material, humorous, and scatological, Luther had “none of our modern prudishness about physical processes.”² Indeed, whenever the devil appears in Luther's works, which is often, “the anal is not far off.”³ Here's a relatively mild example from his *Table Talk*, a hugely popular collection of his conversations, paraphrased by Roper: “When scripture and prayer fail, the best way to be rid of a devil is to fart at him.”

That is exactly what we did. We were young fraternity brothers who had discovered the wonders of the malted beverage. Prodigiously. And my goodness, did we fart a lot. And yes, we never attended church, so we needed some talisman to ward off the twin devils of bad grades and frigid sorority dates. So, we farted at them.

Why did we not just switch to wine? Well, the sulfur in wine causes flatulence, too; albeit not as much. Also, wine farts smelled snooty and elitist, not the earthy, organic, hoppy barnyard odor that we secretly adored. Wine farts smell like the dreaded sorority girl's almost silent *toot, toot, toot* that she made when we

¹ From *Martin Luther's Body: The "Stout Doctor" and His Biographers* by Lyndal Roper

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

were forced to ‘go down on her,’ a desperate measure after all other attempts at seduction aimed at intercourse failed.

Besides, we could not afford the fine wines that tasted great. The Pouilly-Fuisés of the privileged classes. And if you drank Thunderbird, Ripple, Richard's Wild Irish Rose, Mogen David, and the like, you were a *wino*. There is an old Chinese proverb: “Man drinks wine, wine drinks man, wine drinks wine.” Nobody ever said that beer drinks beer.

You can avoid the beer wind by imbibing in only small measure, say one schooner. But who among you can do that? I remember going to a beer hall in Ontario, Canada that only sold beer. If you ordered, you received two pints. If you protested that you had only asked for one beer, the waiter said, “Look, I’ve been working here for 32 years, and I have never met anyone who drank one beer and did not want another.” Yeah, I guess we had to agree.

All this farting presented one pressing problem - odors. Everybody believes that their shit does not stink but all admit that their farts do. We were good buddies and spent most of our time together, drinking beer. Opened windows did not help with the asphyxiation. We made a pact. If you felt a fart coming on, you would go out on the porch and fart at a list of your bad grades or a photo of that recent date with a sorority girl who would not ‘put out.’ Like Luther, ‘farting at the devils.’ However, flatus is not always controllable, and if you had perfected the fine art of the SBD (silent but deadly) break of wind, then you could always point to your neighbor or just claim, “It wasn’t me.” That practice descended to an endless round of finger-pointing. Hurt feelings. What today’s kids call ‘butt hurt.’ Bad humor occurred, and altercations to the point of fisticuffs. This would not do. We all wanted to be friends more than anything else. We came up with a solution. We would get a dog. You could always blame the canine.

But what breed should we get? One that did not fart a lot. Those bred in dry countries, Moslem nations? We could only come up with two – Salukis and Afghans. Now, in those days, we measured everything by its equivalent cost in six packs. We sought out a couple of breeders and found that we could afford an expensive breed only if we gave up beer for a month or more. Since that was completely out of the question, we sauntered over to the local pound. Today they call them ‘rescue dogs’ so that people will feel good about being too cheap or poor to afford a thoroughbred and make a ‘donation’ to the ‘humane’ shelter. Back then, the public kennels were happy to save money on poison gas and carcass disposal. We did not need to rescue a dog; we needed a dog to rescue us.

Not a big dog because we figured a big dog would produce big farts. Then, what bloodlines? All dogs had some identifiable strains to them. Certainly not a *poodle*. No dachshund blood as the *hund* part sounded too much like *hind* as in *behind*. We settled on a happy little mutt. Never would we call him a mongrel as it was derogatory and we wanted royalty, even if it was mixed, like the Queen of England.

We took our dog home and saw how well he did. Not if he was behaved or trained, but if he lacked the gene for passing gas. Well, this dog farted a lot; I mean a whole lot, like once every one-half hour or so. Uh, wait a minute. Do not judge him for this, as this dog’s farts had a rather benign, even pleasant smell that miraculously masked all other odors.

Now we set about feeding the dog chow that had been soaked in beer to increase his already innate inclination towards flatus. We attempted to teach the dog to fart on command, particularly before we started to imbibe. But first, he had to have a name. Someone suggested that he be called *Fart*, for obvious reasons. No, the ladies would not take kindly to that. One guy suggested *Pedo*, which in the Spanish language means *fart*. Now, that sounded pretty good because we did not think that anyone would be checking a dictionary, and we could explain the name by saying, “You know, *Pedo* as in *Pedro*.” Better yet, a French major suggested

the triple entendre French onomatopoetic word for fart, *Pet*. The word was English for mascot and also stood for what humans did for any fawning, domesticated animal.

Pet stuck. Pet was very smart and did not need much training, as he seemed to understand intuitively what we wanted. He responded to the command “Pet Pet, pet.” And all was peaceful in the home. Even the sorority girls were pleased. When friendly Pet happily approached any girl that came into our midst, wagging his tail and silently begging to be petted, our lady friends would invariably ask, “What is the name of this friendly dog.” We answered, “His name is Pet, because he likes petting, just like you.”

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