

Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521: Conversation between Holy Roman Emperor Charles V's representative and the monk Martin Luther:

Charles' representative (CR): "Come then, answer the question of his majesty, whose kindness you have experienced in seeking a time for thought. Do you wish to defend all your acknowledged books, or retract some?"

Luther (L): "My books are of three kinds. Some are works of simple piety that no Christian ruler or church official could possibly want to be withdrawn. A second category are works directed against the papacy and the affairs of the papists as those who both by their doctrines and very wicked examples have laid waste the Christian world with evil affects the spirit and the body." (A third category did contain some things that were overly harsh, which Luther was willing to consider retracting. "Therefore, I ask by the mercy of God, may your most serene majesty, most illustrious lordships, or anyone at all who is able, either high or low, bear witness, expose my errors, overthrowing them by the writings of the prophets and the evangelists. Once I have been taught I shall be quite ready to renounce every error, and I shall be the first to cast my books into the fire.")

CR: "Would you recant or not? Deal plainly, not with a horned or ambiguous reply."

L: "Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed. Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience." Charles V had to tolerate Luther, as he needed Germany as an ally against the French and Turks.