

The Problem with “Here I Stand, I Can Do No Other”

“Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.”

According to some tellings, this is how Protestant Christian reformer Martin Luther responded to demands that he recant positions which the established Church of his time considered heretical.

This is a badass speech, and it’s archetypal in our society. It’s the speech of many martyrs throughout history – people who have chose to accept terrible consequences for their decision to do what’s right.

But it’s technically wrong.

Technically, Martin Luther could very well have done something “other.” He could have recanted. He could have partially recanted. He could have pretended to recant.

And when you pull a page from ML’s book and tell your boss, your parents, your friends, or the Nazi camp guard that you **can’t** do something because it’s against your values/convictions, you’re not being entirely honest either.

“I **can** do no other” is a cop out. You have agency, and you have a choice at all times. If you are going to make a stand for something you believe in, acknowledge that fact.

It may soften the blow for your hearers if you tell them that you **can’t** do what they’re asking you to do. But it almost implies that you **would** if you **could.** If you are making a refusal based on your values, though, there is only one right way to say it:

*“Here I stand. I ***will*** do no other”.*