

Document A: Luther's Letter

To the Most Reverend Father in Christ and Most Illustrious Lord, Albrecht of Magdeburg and Mainz, Archbishop and Primate of the Church, Margrave of Brandenburg, etc., his own lord and pastor in Christ, worthy of reverence and fear, and most gracious.

JESUS

The grace of God be with you in all its fulness and power! Spare me, Most Reverend Father in Christ and Most Illustrious Prince, that I, the dregs of humanity, have so much boldness that I have dared to think of a letter to the height of your Sublimity. The Lord Jesus is my witness that, conscious of my smallness and baseness, I have long deferred what I am now shameless enough to do, -- moved thereto most of all by the duty of fidelity which I acknowledge that I owe to your most Reverend Fatherhood in Christ. Meanwhile, therefore, may your Highness deign to cast an eye upon one speck of dust, and for the sake of your pontifical clemency to heed my prayer. Papal indulgences for the building of St. Peter's are circulating under your most distinguished name, and as regards them, I do not bring accusation against the outcries of the preachers, which I have not heard, so much as I grieve over the wholly false impressions which the people have conceived from them; to wit, -- the unhappy souls believe that if they have purchased letters of indulgence they are sure of their salvation; again, that so soon as they cast their contributions into the money-box, souls fly out of purgatory; furthermore, that these graces [i.e., the graces conferred in the indulgences] are so great that there is no sin too great to be absolved, even, as they say -- though the thing is impossible -- if one had violated the Mother of God; again, that a man is free, through these indulgences, from all penalty and guilt.

O God, most good! Thus souls committed to your care, good Father, are taught to their death, and the strict account, which you must render for all such, grows and increases. For this reason I have no longer been able to keep quiet about this matter, for it is by no gift of a bishop that man becomes sure of salvation, since he gains this certainty not even by the "in-poured grace" of God, but the Apostle bids us always "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling," and Peter says, "the righteous scarcely shall be saved." Finally, so narrow is the way that leads to

life, that the Lord, through the prophets Amos and Zechariah, calls those who shall be saved "brands plucked from the burning," and everywhere declares the difficulty of salvation. Why, then, do the preachers of pardons, by these false fables and promises, make the people careless and fearless? Whereas indulgences confer on us no good gift, either for salvation or for sanctity, but only take away the external penalty, which it was formerly the custom to impose according to the canons.

Finally, works of piety and love are infinitely better than indulgences, and yet these are not preached with such ceremony or such zeal; nay, for the sake of preaching the indulgences they are kept quiet, though it is the first and the sole duty of all bishops that the people should learn the Gospel and the love of Christ, for Christ never taught that indulgences should be preached. How great then is the horror, how great the peril of a bishop, if he permits the Gospel to be kept quiet, and nothing but the noise of indulgences to be spread among his people! Will not Christ say to them, "straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel"? In addition to this, Most Reverend Father in the Lord, it is said in the Instruction to the Commissaries which is issued under your name, Most Reverend Father (doubtless without your knowledge and consent), that one of the chief graces of indulgence is that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to God, and all the penalties of purgatory are destroyed. Again, it is said that contrition is not necessary in those who purchase souls [out of purgatory] or buy confessionalia.

But what can I do, good Primate and Most Illustrious Prince, except pray your Most Reverend Fatherhood by the Lord Jesus Christ that you would deign to look [on this matter] with the eye of fatherly care, and do away entirely with that treatise and impose upon the preachers of pardons another form of preaching; lest, perchance, one may some time arise, who will publish writings in which he will confute both them and that treatise, to the shame of your Most Illustrious Sublimity. I shrink very much from thinking that this will be done, and yet I fear that it will come to pass, unless there is some speedy remedy.

These faithful offices of my insignificance I beg that your Most Illustrious Grace may deign to accept in the spirit of a Prince and a Bishop, i.e., with the greatest clemency, as I offer them out of a faithful heart, altogether devoted to you, Most Reverend Father, since I too am a part of

your flock.

May the Lord Jesus have your Most Reverend Fatherhood eternally in His keeping. Amen.

Source: Martin Luther's Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz, 1517. From, *The Works of Martin Luther*. Ed. and trans. Adolph Spaeth, L.D. Reed, Henry Eyster Jacobs, et al. Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915, Vol. 1, pp. 25-28. Retrieved from: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/lutherltr-indulgences.asp>

Document B: Luther, 1535

The Thatcher source text archives from which this text is taken is entitled Against Catholicism but without further identification. Until further information, I surmise that the text here is comprised of a series of extracts from Luther's Table Talk. The text, however derived, does summarize much of the anti-papalism of the Reformation.

The chief cause that I fell out with the pope was this: the pope boasted that he was the head of the Church, and condemned all that would not be under his power and authority; for he said, although Christ be the head of the Church, yet, notwithstanding, there must be a corporal head of the Church upon earth. With this I could have been content, had he but taught the gospel pure and clear, and not introduced human inventions and lies in its stead. Further, he took upon him power, rule, and authority over the Christian Church, and over the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God; no man must presume to expound the Scriptures, but only he, and according to his ridiculous conceits; so that he made himself lord over the Church, proclaiming her at the same time a powerful mother, and empress over the Scriptures, to which we must yield and be obedient; this was not to be endured. They who, against God's Word, boast of the Church's authority, are mere idiots. The pope attributes more power to the Church, which is begotten and born, than to the Word, which has begotten, conceived, and born the Church.

We, through God's grace, are not heretics, but schismatics, causing, indeed, separation and division, wherein we are not to blame, but our adversaries, who gave occasion thereto, because

they remain not by God's Word alone, which we have, hear, and follow. When our Lord God intends to plague and punish one, He leaves him in blindness, so that he regards not God's Word, but condemns the same, as the papists now do. They know that our doctrine is God's Word, but they will not allow of this syllogism and conclusion: When God speaks, we must hear him; now God speaks through the doctrine of the gospel; therefore we must hear Him. But the papists, against their own consciences, say, No; we must hear the Church. It is very strange: they admit propositions, but will not allow of the consequences, or permit the conclusions to be right. They urge some decree or other of the Council of Constance, and say, though Christ speak, who is the truth itself, yet an ancient custom must be preferred, and observed for law. Thus do they answer, when they seek to wrest and pervert the truth.

If this sin of antichrist be not a sin against the Holy Ghost, then I do not know how to define and distinguish sins. They sin herein wilfully against the revealed truth of God's Word, in a most stubborn and stiff-necked manner. I pray, who would not, in this case, resist these devilish and shameless lying lips? I marvel not John Hus died so joyfully, seeing he heard of such abominable impieties and wickedness of the papists. I pray, how holds the pope concerning the Church? He preserves her, but only in an external luster, pomp, and succession. But we judge her according to her essence, as she is in herself, in her own substance, that is, according to God's Word and sacraments. The pope is reserved for God's judgment, therefore only by God's judgment he shall be destroyed. Henry VIII, king of England, is now also an enemy to the pope's person, but not to his essence and substance; he would only kill the body of the pope, but suffer his soul, that is, his false doctrine, to live; the pope can well endure such an enemy; he hopes within the space of twenty years to recover his rule and government again. But I fall upon the pope's soul, his doctrine, with God's word, not regarding his body, that is, his wicked person and life. I not only pluck out his feathers, as the king of England and prince Georg of Saxony do, but I set the knife to his throat, and cut his windpipe asunder. We put the goose on the spit; did we but pluck her, the feathers would soon grow again. Therefore is Satan so bitter an enemy unto us, because we cut the pope's throat, as does also the king of Denmark, who aims at the essence of popery.

'Tis wonderful how, in this our time, the majesty of the pope is fallen. Heretofore, all monarchs, emperors, kings, and princes feared the pope's power, who held them all at his nod; none durst so much as mutter a word against him. This great god is now fallen; his own creatures, the friars

and monks, are his enemies, who, if they still continue with him, do so for the sake of gain; otherwise they would oppose him more fiercely than we do. The pope's crown is named *regnum mundi*, the kingdom of the world. I have heard it credibly reported at Rome, that this crown is worth more than all the principdoms of Germany. God placed popedom in Italy not without cause, for the Italians can make out many things to be real and true, which in truth are not so: they have crafty and subtle brains.

If the pope were the head of the Christian Church, then the Church were a monster with two heads, seeing that St. Paul says that Christ is her head. The pope may well be, and is, the head of the false Church. Where the linnet is, there is also the cuckoo, for he thinks his song a thousand times better than the linnet's. Even thus, the pope places himself in the Church, and so that his song may be heard, overcrows the Church. The cuckoo is good for something, in that its appearance gives tidings that summer is at hand; so the pope serves to show us that the last day of judgment approaches. There are many that think I am too fierce against popedom; on the contrary, I complain that I am, alas! too mild; I wish I could breathe out lightning against pope and popedom, and that every word were a thunderbolt.

'Tis an idle dream the papists entertain of antichrist; they suppose he should be a single person, that should govern, scatter money amongst them, do miracles, carry a fiery oven about him, and kill the saints. In popedom they make priests, not to preach and teach God's Word, but only to celebrate mass, and to gad about with the sacrament. For, when a bishop ordains a man, he says: Take unto thee power to celebrate mass, and to offer for the living and the dead. But we ordain priests according to the command of Christ and St. Paul, namely, to preach the pure gospel and God's Word. The papists in their ordinations make no mention of preaching and teaching God's Word, therefore their consecrating and ordaining is false and unright, for all worshiping which is not ordained of God, or erected by God's Word and command, is nothing worth, yea, mere idolatry.

Next unto my just cause the small repute and mean aspect of my person gave the blow to the pope. For when I began to preach and write, the pope scorned and contemned me; he thought: 'Tis but one poor friar; what can he do against me? I have maintained and defended this doctrine in popedom, against many emperors, kings, and princes, what then shall this one man

do? If he had condescended to regard me, he might easily have suppressed me in the beginning.

A German, making his confession to a priest at Rome, promised, on oath, to keep secret whatsoever the priest should impart unto him, until he reached home; whereupon the priest gave him a leg of the ass on which Christ rode into Jerusalem, very neatly bound up in silk, and said: This is the holy relic on which the Lord Christ corporally did sit, with his sacred legs touching this ass's leg. Then was the German wondrous glad, and carried the said holy relic with him into Germany. When he got to the borders, he bragged of his holy relic in the presence of four others, his comrades, when, lo! it turned out that each of them had likewise received from the same priest a leg, after promising the same secrecy. Thereupon, all exclaimed, with great wonder: Lord! had that ass five legs?

A picture being brought to Luther, in which the pope, with Judas the traitor, were represented hanging on the purse and keys, he said: 'Twill vex the pope horribly, that he, whom emperors and kings have worshiped, should now be figured hanging on his false pick-locks. It will also grieve the papists, for their consciences will be touched. The purse accords well with the cardinal's hats and their incomes, for the pope's covetousness has been so gross, that in all kingdoms he has not only raked to himself Annates, Pallium-money, &c., but has also sold for money the holy sacrament, indulgences, fraternities, Christ's blood, matrimony, etc. Therefore, his purse is filled with robberies, upon which justly ought to be exclaimed, as in the Revelations; "Recompense them as they have done to you, and make it double unto them, according to their works." Therefore, seeing the pope has damned me and given me over to the devil, so will I, in requital, hang him on his own keys.

It is abominable that in so many of the pope's decrees, there is not one single sentence of Holy Scripture, or one article of the Catechism mentioned. The pope intending to conduct the government of his Church in an external way, his teachings were blasphemous; such as that a stinking friar's hood, put upon a dead body, procured remission of sins, and was of equal value with the merits of our blessed Savior Christ Jesus.

It is no marvel that the papists hate me so vehemently, for I have well deserved it at their hands. Christ more mildly reprov'd the Jews than I the papists, yet they killed him. These, therefore, think they justly persecute me, but, according to God's laws and will, they shall find their

mistake. In the day of the last judgment I will denounce the pope and his tyrants, who scorn and assail the Word of God, and his sacraments. The pope destroys poor married priests, that receive and observe God's Word and statutes, whereas by all their laws they are only to be displaced from their office. So Prince Georg has banished and driven away from Oschitz ten citizens and householders, with twenty-seven children, martyrs to the Word. Their sighs will rise up to heaven against him.

The pope and his crew can in nowise endure the idea of reformation; the mere word creates more alarm at Rome, than thunderbolts from heaven, or the day of judgment. A cardinal said, the other day: Let them eat, and drink, and do what they will; but as to reforming us, we think that is a vain idea; we will not endure it. Neither will we Protestants be satisfied, though they administer the sacrament in both kinds, and permit priests to marry; we will also have doctrine of the faith pure and unfalsified, and the righteousness that justifies and saves before God, and which expels and drives away all idolatry and false-worshiping; these gone and banished, the foundation on which popedom is built falls also.

We will have the holy sacrament administered in both kinds, that it shall be free for priests to marry, or to forbear, and we will in no way suffer ourselves to be bereaved of the article of justification: "That by faith only in Jesus Christ we are justified and saved before God; without any works, merits and deserts, merely by grace and mercy." This we must keep and preserve, pure and unfalsified, if we intend to be saved. As to private mass, we cannot hinder it, but must leave it to God, to be acted by those over whom we have neither power nor command; yet, nevertheless, we will openly teach and preach against it, and show that it is abominable blasphemy and idolatry. Either we must go together by the ears, or else they, in our countries, must yield unto us in this particular; if it come to pass that herein they yield unto us, then must we be contented; for, like as the Christians dealt with the Arians, and as St. Paul was constrained to carry himself towards the Jews, even so must we also leave the papists to their own consciences, and seeing they will not follow us, so we neither can nor will force them, but must let them go and commit it to God's judgment; and truly, sincerely, and diligently hold unto and maintain our doctrine, let the same vex, anger, and displease whom it will.

The papists see they have an ill cause, and, therefore, labor to maintain it with very poor arguments, that can not endure the proof, and may be easily confuted. They say: "The praising

of anything is an invocation; the saints are to be praised, therefore they are to be invoked." I answer: No, in nowise; for every praising is not invoking: married people are to be praised, but not to be invoked; for invocation belongs only to God and not to any creature, either in heaven or on earth; no, not to any angel. They say: "The doctrine of the remission of sins is necessary: indulgences, pardons, and graces are remissions of sins; therefore they are necessary." No: the pope's pardons are not remissions of sins, but satisfactions of sins, but satisfactions for remitting the punishments: mere fables and fictions.

When I was in Rome, a disputation was held, at which were present thirty learned doctors besides myself, against the pope's power; he boasting, that with his right hand he commands the angels in heaven, and with his left draws souls out of purgatory, and that his person is mingled with the godhead. Calixtus disputed against these assertions, and showed that it was only on earth that power was given to the pope to bind and to loose. The other doctors hereupon assailed him with exceeding vehemence, and Calixtus discontinued his arguments, saying, he had only spoken by way of disputation, and that his real opinions were far otherwise.

For the space of many hundreds years there has not been a single bishop that has shown any zeal on the subject of schools, baptism, and preaching; 'twould have been too great trouble for them, such enemies were they to God. I have heard divers worthy doctors affirm, that the Church has long since stood in need of reformation; but no man was so bold as to assail popedom; for the pope had on his banner, *Noli me tangere*; therefore every man was silent. Dr. Staupitz said once to me: "If you meddle with popedom, you will have the whole world against you;" and he added "yet the Church is built on blood, and with blood must be sprinkled."

I would have all those who intend to preach the gospel, diligently read the popish abominations, their decrees and books; and, above all things, thoroughly consider the horrors of the mass--on account of which idol God might justly have drowned and destroyed the whole earth--to the end their consciences may be armed and confirmed against their adversaries.

The fasting of the friars is more easy to them than our eating to us. For one day of fasting there are three of feasting. Every friar for his supper has two quarts of beer, a quart of wine, and spice-cakes, or bread prepared with spice and salt, the better to relish their drink. Thus go on these poor fasting brethren; getting so pale and wan, they are like the fiery angels. If the

emperor would merit immortal praise, he would utterly root out the order of the Capuchins, and, for an everlasting remembrance of their abominations, cause their books to remain in safe custody. 'Tis the worst and most poisonous sect. The Augustine and Bernardine friars are no way comparable with these confounded lice.

Francis was an Italian, born in the city of Assisi, doubtless an honest and just man. He little thought that such superstition and unbelief would proceed out of his life. There have been so many of those grey friars, that they offered to send forty thousand of their number against the Turks, and yet leave their monasteries sufficiently provided for. The Franciscan and grey friars came up under the emperor Frederick II, at the time St. Elisabeth was canonized, in the year 1207. Francis worked his game eighteen years; two years under the emperor Philip, four years under the emperor Otho, and twelve years under the emperor Frederick II. They feign, that after his death he appeared to the pope in a dream, held a cup in his hand, and filled the same with blood that ran out of his side. Is not this, think ye, a fine and proper piece of government, that began with dreams and with lies? The pope is not God's image, but his ape. He will be both God and emperor; as pope Innocent III said: I will either take the crown from the emperor Philip, or he shall take mine from me. Oh, such histories ought diligently to be written, to the end posterity may know upon what grounds popedom was erected and founded; namely, upon mere lies and fables. If I were younger, I would write a chronicle of the popes.

If the pope should seek to suppress the mendicant friars, he would find fine sport; he has made them fat, and cherished them in his bosom, and assigned them the greatest and most powerful princes for protectors. If he should attempt to abolish them, they would all combine and instigate the princes against him, for many kings and princes, and the emperor himself, have friars for confessors. The friars were the pope's columns, they carried him as the rats carry their king; I was our Lord God's quicksilver, which he threw into the fishpond; that is, which he cast among the friars. A friar is evil every way, whether in the monastery or out of it. For as Aristotle gives an example touching fire, that burns whether it be in Ethiopia or in Germany, even so is it likewise with the friars. Nature is not changed by any circumstances of time or place.

In Italy was a particular order of friars, called Fratres Ignorantiae, that is, Brethren of Ignorance, who took a solemn oath, that they would neither know, learn, nor understand anything at all, but answer all questions with Nescio. Truly, all friars are well worthy of this title, for they only read

and babble out the words, but regard not their meaning. The pope and cardinals think: should these brethren study and be learned, they would master us. Therefore, *saccum per neccum*, that is, hang a bag about their necks, and send them a-begging through cities, towns and countries.

An honest matron here in Wittenberg, widow of the consul Horndorff, complained of the covetousness of the Capuchins, one of whom pressed her father, upon his deathbed, to bequeath something to their monastery, and got from him four hundred florins, for the use of the monastery, the friar constraining herself to make a vow, that she would mention the matter to no person. The man kept the money, which course he usually took, to the great hurt of all the children and orphans in that city. At last, by command of the magistrate, she told how the friar had acted. Many such examples have been, yet no creature dared complain. There was no end of the robbing, filching, and stealing, of those insatiable, money-diseased wretches.

When I was in the monastery at Erfurt, a preaching friar and a bare-foot friar wandered into the country to beg for the brethren, and to gather alms. These two played upon each other in their sermons. The bare-foot friar preaching first, said: "Loving country people, and good friends! take heed of that bird the swallow, for it is white within, but upon the back it is black; it is an evil bird, always chirping, but profitable for nothing; and when angered, is altogether mad," hereby describing the preaching friar, who wear on the outside black coats, and inside white linen. Now, in the afternoon, the preaching friar came into the pulpit and played upon the bare-foot friar: "Indeed, loving friends, I neither may nor can well defend the swallow; but the grey sparrow is far a worse and more hurtful bird than the swallow; for it bites the kine, and when it fouls into people's eyes, makes them blind, as ye may see in the book of Tobit. He robs, steals, and devours all he can get, as oats, barley, wheat, rye, apples, pears, peas, cherries, &c. Moreover, he is a lascivious bird: his greatest art is to cry: 'Scrip, scrip,'" etc. The bare-foot friar might in better colors have painted the preaching friars, for they are proud buzzards and right epicureans; while the bare-foot friars, under color of sanctity and humility, are more proud and haughty than kings or princes, and, most of all, have imagined and devised monstrous lies.

St. Bernard was the best monk that ever was, whom I love beyond all the rest put together; yet he dared to say, it were a sign of damnation if a man quitted his monastery. He had under him three thousand monks, not one of whom was damned, if his opinion be true, *sed vix credo*. St. Bernard lived in dangerous times, under the emperors Henry IV and V, Conrad and Lothaire.

He was a learned and able monk, but he gave evil example. The friars, especially the Minorites and Franciscans, had easy days by their hypocrisy; they touched no money, yet they were vastly rich, and lived in luxury. The evil friar's life began betimes, when people, under color of piety, abandoned temporal matters. The vocation and condition of a true Christian, such as God ordained and founded it, consists in three hierarchies---domestic, temporal, and Church government.

The state of celibacy is great hypocrisy and wickedness. Augustine, though he lived in a good and acceptable time, was deceived through the exaltation of nuns. And although he gave them leave to marry, yet he said they did wrong to marry, and sinned against God. Afterwards, when the time of wrath and blindness came, and the truth was hunted away, and lying got the upper hand, the generation of poor women was contemned, under the color of great holiness, but which, in truth, was mere hypocrisy. Christ with one sentence confutes all their arguments: God created them male and female.

Source: Oliver J. Thatcher, ed., *The Library of Original Sources* (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1907), Vol. V: 9th to 16th Centuries, pp.119-127.
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1535luther.asp>