

## SSWH9: Reformation Primary Sources

Martin Luther: Excerpts from a Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz, 1517.

*To the Most Reverend Father in Christ and Most Illustrious Lord, Albrecht of Magdeburg and Mainz.*

The grace of God be with you in all its fullness 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. ...

Works of **piety** and love are infinitely better than indulgences, and yet these are not preached with such ceremony or 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! ...

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.

From Wittenberg on the Vigil of All Saints, MDXVII.

Source: "Letter to Archbishop of Mainz, 1517," Internet Modern History Sourcebook, Paul Halsall, ed., <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook1.html>

Terms:

**Sublimity**—awe-inspiring

**Pontifical**—having to do with the pope

**Indulgence**—a pardon for sin sold by the Church

**Deign**—deem worthy

**Piety**—sincere devotion to God and to religious obligations

Excerpt of Pope Leo X's Bull, issued on June 15, 1520.

Arise, O Lord, and judge your own cause. Remember your reproaches to those who are filled with foolishness all through the day. Listen to our prayers, for foxes have arisen seeking to destroy the vineyard whose winepress you alone have trod...

For we can scarcely express, from distress and grief of mind, what has reached our ears for some time by the report of reliable men and general rumor; alas, we have even seen with our eyes and read the many diverse errors. Some of these have already been condemned by councils and the constitutions of our predecessors, and expressly contain even the heresy of the Greeks and Bohemians. Other errors are either **heretical**, false, scandalous, or offensive to pious ears, as seductive of simple minds, originating with false exponents of the faith who in their proud curiosity yearn for the world's glory, and contrary to the Apostle's teaching, wish to be wiser than they should be.

With the advice and consent of these our venerable brothers, with mature deliberation on each and every one of the above theses, and by the authority of almighty God, the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own authority, we condemn, **reprobate**, and reject completely each of these theses or errors as either heretical, scandalous, false, offensive to pious ears or seductive of simple minds, and against Catholic truth. By listing them, we decree and declare that all the faithful of both sexes must regard them as condemned, reprobated, and rejected... We restrain all in the virtue of holy obedience and under the penalty of an automatic major **excommunication**...

Moreover, because the preceding errors and many others are contained in the books or writings of Martin Luther, we likewise condemn, reprobate, and reject completely the books and all the writings and sermons of the said Martin, whether in Latin or any other language, containing the said errors or any one of them; and we wish them to be regarded as utterly condemned, reprobated, and rejected. We forbid each and every one of the faithful of either sex, in virtue of holy obedience and under the above penalties to be incurred automatically, to read, assert, preach, praise, print, publish, or defend them. They will incur these penalties if they presume to uphold them in any way, personally or through another or others, directly or indirectly, tacitly or explicitly, publicly or **occultly**.

Therefore let Martin himself and all those adhering to him, and those who shelter and support him, through the merciful heart of our God and the sprinkling of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ by which and through whom the redemption of the human race and the upbuilding of holy mother Church was accomplished, know that from our heart we exhort and beseech that he cease to disturb the peace, unity, and truth of the Church for which the Savior prayed so earnestly to the Father. Let him abstain from his **pernicious** errors that he may come back to us. If they really will obey, and certify to us by legal documents that they have obeyed, they will find in us the affection of a father's love, the opening of the font of the effects of paternal charity, and opening of the font of mercy and **clemency**.

We enjoin, however, on Martin that in the meantime he cease from all preaching or the office of preacher.

Source: "Pope Leo X: *Exsurge Domine*," 15 June, 1520, Internet Modern History Sourcebook, Paul Halsall, ed., <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook1.html>.

Terms:

**Bull**—official document issued by the pope

**Heretical**—contrary to Church teachings

**Reprobate**—strongly disapprove

**Excommunication**—expulsion from the Church

**Occultly**—in secret

**Pernicious**—wicked

**Clemency**—mercy