

1 **THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN 1520**

Session 3

Luther's Epistle to Leo X, Supreme Pontiff

2 **THE LETTER TO LEO X**

- 1 • Has all the characteristics of polished Renaissance Latin prose expected for a writing that addresses the pope.
 - Two separate arguments (seen in the headings)
 - Tone may sound "fake" to our modern ears.
 - Letter offers the same type of paradoxical thinking as the treatise: Leo X is innocent; the papal court is guilty.
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- 2 • Took direct aim at his bitterest opponent, Johann Eck (1486-1543).
 - Also mentions one of his favorite medieval theologians, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) who had written a similar letter to Pope Eugene III (1383-1447)
 - Sadly, Luther's appeal to Leo went unanswered.

3 **EXORDIUM (INTRODUCTION)
PARAGRAPH 1**

- 1 • "Surrounded by the monsters of this age, with which I have struggled and battled for three years, I am compelled at times to look to you and to think of you, Leo, most blessed father."
 - "I have never turned my soul away from Your Holiness so as neither to desire with all my powers the very best for you and for your see nor, as far as was in me, to seek the same with earnest and heartfelt prayers to God."
- 2 • "I realize that I am accused of impertinence, now twisted into my greatest vice, because I am judged to have attacked your person."

4 **PART ONE: LUTHER'S DEFENSE**

Answering Three Questions in His Defense

5 **1. WHETHER HE COMMITTED THE OFFENSE
PARAGRAPH 2**

- 1 • "...whenever your person has been mentioned, I am aware of having only said the greatest and best things."
 - "I have defended your remarkable innocence against your defiler, Sylvester [Prierias]."
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- 2 • "Nor am I so foolish to attack someone whom absolutely everyone praises."
 - "For I take pleasure in no one's faults, since I myself am conscious enough of the long in my own eye. Nor do I want to be the first who throws a stone at the adultrress."

6 **2. WHAT LUTHER ACTUALLY DID AND WHETHER THIS WAS PROPER (PARA #3)**

- "Now, generally I have sharply attacked ungodly teachings, and I have been quick to snap at my opponents not because of their bad morals but because of their godlessness."
- Examples of Jesus, Paul and the prophets.
- "sensitive ears of our rational age"

7 **3. SUMMARY CONCLUSION**

- "For this reason, most excellent Leo, I beg you to admit that this letter vindicates me."

- Luther has no problem with Leo as a person, "but over the Word of truth alone."
- "I cannot and will not yield or deny the Word."

8 **PROOF THAT LUTHER ACTED PROPERLY**

Answering Four Questions

9 **1. THE CORRUPTION IN THE ROMAN CURIA (PARAGRAPH #5)**

- 1 • "curia" is Latin for court, and the papal court consists of cardinals, bishops and other clerical functionaries.
 - "more corrupt than Babylon or Sodom"
 - Luther speaks not for himself, "but I do acknowledge the debt owed to my fellow Christians..."
- 2 • "All this is clearer than day to everyone."
 - "...out of the Roman Church, once the holiest of all, has been fashioned a completely licentious den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell, so that were the Antichrist to come, he could hardly think of anything that would add to its wickedness."

10 **2. LUTHER'S COMPASSION FOR THE POPE (PARAGRAPH #6)**

- "In the meantime, you, Leo, sit as a lamb in the midst of wolves, as Daniel in the midst of lions..."
- "It is all over for the Roman Curia. The wrath of God has fallen upon it completely."
- "I have always been grieved, most excellent Leo, that you, who were worthy of far better times, became pope in this day and age."

11 **3. WHAT THE POPE SHOULD DO (PARAGRAPH #7)**

- "O that, having cast aside the glory that your completely accursed enemies heap upon you, you would instead live on the small income of a parish priest or on your family's inheritance."
- Example of Bernard having compassion on Pope Eugenius and the 300 years that have since passed.

12 **4. A RECAPITULATION OF PART ONE (PARAGRAPH #8)**

- "I completely avoided raging against your person because I even hoped that I would gain your favor and cause your rescue."
- "Those who harm the Curia serve your office; those who by any and all means curse it glorify Christ."
- "In short, Christians are those who are not 'Romans.'"

13 **PART TWO: A NARRATIVE OF LUTHER'S CASE**

Consisting of Four Parts

14 **1. THE REAL CAUSE OF THE DISPUTE (PARAGRAPH #9)**

- Luther was minding his own business, he says, until "Satan opened his eyes and goaded his servant Johann Eck, a noted enemy of Christ, with an uncontrollable desire for glory."
- "When the debate ended unhappily for the Sophist, an incredible madness seized the man..."

15 **2. THE PROGRESSION OF THE CASE (PARAGRAPHS #10-13)**

- Luther had to prove that he had done everything in his power to avoid this conflict.
- Cardinal Cajetan, a Dominican, was papal legate (ambassador) to the 1518 imperial Diet of Augsburg
- Karl von Miltitz, papal ambassador north of the Alps in 1518 and 1519 with instructions to resolve the dispute with Luther.

16 **2. THE PROGRESSION OF THE CASE (PARAGRAPHS #10-13) (CONT)**

- Roman corruption came to light, but “whatever wrong was committed was Eck’s fault.”
- “Today the name ‘Roman Curia’ reeks the world over, and papal authority languishes.”
- Karl von Miltitz’s 3rd try at chapter meeting of Augustinians led to this letter.

17 **3. A CLOSING PLEA FOR MERCY (PARAGRAPH #14)**

- 1 • “So, most Holy Father, I come and, even now, prostrate myself before you, begging, if possible, that you lay your hands on those flatterers and enemies of peace (who only pretend to want peace) and rein them in.”
 - “I will permit no binding laws for interpreting the Word of God, since ‘the Word of God must not be bound’ because it teaches freedom in all other matters.”
- 2 • “I do not want to be provoked. But if I am provoked (with Christ as my teacher), I will not be at a loss for words.”
 - “Your Holiness could, with a short and simple word, command both parties to be silent and keep the peace, which is what I have always wanted to hear.”

18 **PERORATION (CONCLUSION): ADVICE FOR POPE LEO (PARAGRAPHS #15, 16)**

- “You are a servant of servants and, more than all other human beings, in a most miserable and dangerous position.”
- “In sum, believe none of those who exalt you but only those who humble you.”
- “But I emulate Saint Bernard in his book ‘On Consideration,’ addressed to Pope Eugenius, which every pope should commit to memory.”

19 **INTRODUCTION TO THE TRACT (PARAGRAPH 17)**

- “In conclusion, so that I might not approach you, Holy Father, empty-handed, I offer this little tract, published under your name, in the prospect of an established peace and good hope.”
- “It is a small thing with respect to its size, but (unless I am mistaken) it contains a summary of the whole Christian life, if you understand its meaning.”

20 **NEXT WEEK: THE POWER OF THE LIVING WORD OF GOD**

- In “The Freedom of a Christian,” read paragraphs 18-30, found on pages 487 through 492