

Document A: The Introduction to the *95 Theses* (Excerpted from Original)

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 "inpoured 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.*

Document B: Against Catholicism (Excerpted from Original)

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 principedoms 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.

Source: *From Luther's Table Talk, 1535.*