

A STUDY OF THE Protestant Reformation

1517 - 2017

The 500th Anniversary





Introduction: Part 13

After the twenty-day Leipzig Debate in the summer of 1519 over papal primacy and authority, Luther remarked that “there was a great loss of time, but no seeking after truth. We have been examining the doctrines of our adversaries these two years past, so that we have counted all their bones. Eck, on the contrary, has hardly grazed the surface; but he has made more noise in one hour than we have in two long years.”

While many were persuaded by Luther and began to study the Bible more closely, others were readily subdued by the truth and were won to the Reformation. The students, particularly, received Luther’s words with enthusiasm. “They saw that Luther relied upon the Word of God, and that Eck’s opinions were grounded on human tradition.”



“Luther’s words had found an echo everywhere – in cottages and convents, in the homes of the citizens and in the castles of the nobles, in the universities and in the palaces of kings” (D’Aubigné).

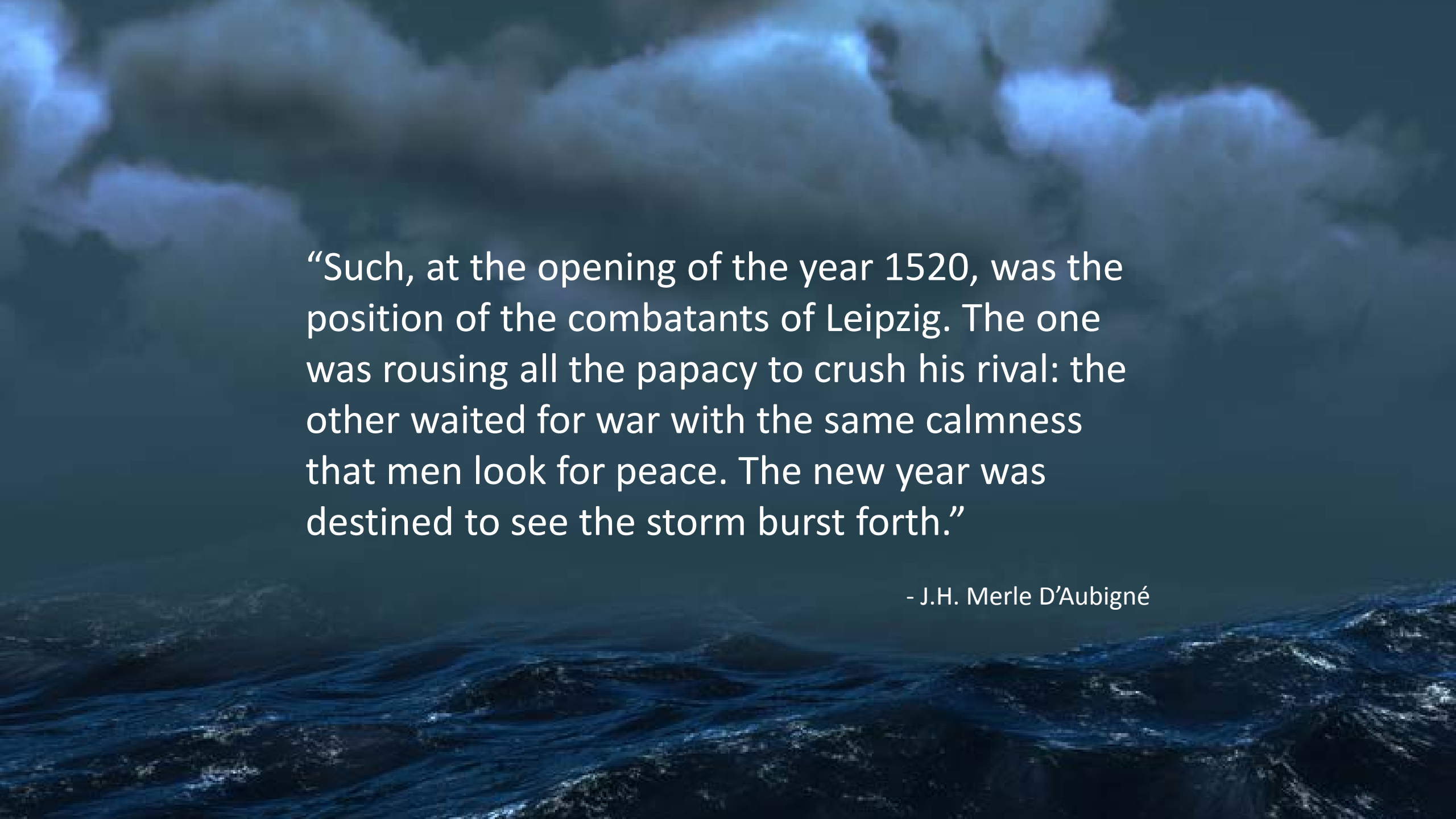


Introduction

Luther pointed to the Leipzig Debate as that of “his emancipation from the papal yoke.” He “separated from the papacy, and then felt toward it a decided aversion and holy indignation.”

Eck, on the other hand, intoxicated with what he thought was his victory over Luther (though he was really wounded), continued to attack and approach Luther. He was “forming plans of revenge. Instead of the laurels that he had reckoned on gaining, the Leipzig gladiator had become the laughingstock of all the sensible men of his nation.”

Undaunted in his mission, Eck set out for Italy to forge new weapons against his enemy Martin Luther.

The background of the image is a dramatic, dark blue scene of a stormy sea and sky. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, and the sea below is turbulent with white-capped waves. The overall mood is one of impending danger and conflict.

“Such, at the opening of the year 1520, was the position of the combatants of Leipzig. The one was rousing all the papacy to crush his rival: the other waited for war with the same calmness that men look for peace. The new year was destined to see the storm burst forth.”

- J.H. Merle D'Aubigné

Timeline After Leipzig

- June 27-July 16, 1519: Leipzig Disputation
- Luther's works condemned and burned by the Universities of Cologne and Louvain
- June 15, 1520: Papal bull threatening excommunication
- June 23, 1520: *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*
- October 6, 1520: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*
- October 10, 1520: Luther receives the papal bull
- November, 1520: *The Freedom of a Christian*
- December 10, 1520: Burning of the bull and canon law in Wittenberg



Eck's Revenge Against Luther in Rome

- John Eck invoked the power of the Vatican, pope, cardinals, monks, and all Rome to oppose Luther.
- The Roman Catholic Church thought of herself as divinely appointed by God to govern the entire church. “We cannot, therefore, be astonished that she prepared to strike the most terrible blows.”
- Even though Eck came up against powerful obstacles (many were opposed to using violence), he “vented his rage and called for revenge....He saw that there should be no delay in cutting off this gangrened limb, for fear the disease should infect the whole body.”
- He finally persuaded the pope, and Leo X gave way to Eck.

Eck's Assessment



John Eck
1486-1543

“It was fortunate that I came to Rome at this time, for they were but a little acquainted with Luther’s errors. It will one day be known how much I have done in this cause.”



D'Aubigne's Portrait of Johann Eck

Eck “was sincerely attached to the papacy, but seems to have had no true religious sentiments, and to have been one of that class of men, so numerous in every age, who look upon science, and even theology and religion, as the means of acquiring worldly reputation. Vain glory lies hid under the priest’s cassock no less than under the warrior’s coat of mail. Eck had studied the art of disputation according to the rules of the schoolmen, and had become a master in this sort of controversy. While the knights of the middle ages and the warriors in the time of the Reformation sought for glory in the tournament, the schoolmen struggled for it in syllogistic disputations - a spectacle of frequent occurrence in the universities. Eck, who entertained no mean (low)



D'Aubigne's Portrait of Johann Eck

idea of himself, and who was proud of his talents, of the popularity of his cause, and of the victories he had gained in eight universities of Hungary, Lombardy, and Germany, ardently desired to have an opportunity of trying his strength and skill against the reformer. He had spared no exertion to acquire the reputation of being one of the most learned men of the age. He was constantly endeavoring to excite some new discussion, to make a sensation, and aimed at procuring, by means of his exploits, all the enjoyments of life. A journey that he had made to Italy had been, according to his own account, one long series of triumphs. The most learned scholars had been forced to subscribe to his theses. This experienced gladiator fixed his eyes on a new field of battle, in which he thought the victory already secure."



The Pope's Decision

- Leo X resolved to rend (divide) the church. He decided on a pontifical bull, a letter of divorcement.
- Once Luther's condemnation was decided, the theologians were of the opinion that the formal pronouncement be issued immediately.
- A final conference was held in the pope's presence at his villa of Malliano. On June 15, the Sacred College decided on the condemnation and sanctioned the bull.
- Leo X: "So soon as this bull shall be published, the bishops shall make diligent search after the writings of Martin Luther that contain these errors, and burn them publicly and solemnly in the presence of the clergy and laity."



The Pope's Bull of Condemnation

- The word *bull* is from the Latin *bullā* meaning “seal,” originally named after the leaden seal that was appended to the end of a Roman Catholic papal edict or mandate. Later, the term referred to the edicts themselves.
- A commission – including Eck and Cajetan – appointed by the pope in the spring of 1520 examined Luther's doctrines. They listed 41 statements from Luther's works, saying they were “heretical, offensive, and false,” and drew up a bull of condemnation against him.
- It was accepted and signed by the pope on June 15, 1520.

Exsurge Domine



- The papal bull, known by its opening words, *Exsurge Domine* (“Arise, O Lord”), announced the conditional excommunication of Martin Luther.
- The title in Latin is ***Bulla contra errores Martini Lutheri [et] sequacium*** (*Bull against the errors of Martin Luther and of his followers*).
- Luther was given 60 days to submit.



The Pope's *Preface* to the Bull

“Arise, O Lord, and judge thy cause. A wild boar has invaded thy vineyard. Arise, O Peter, and consider the case of the Holy Roman Church, the mother of all churches, consecrated by thy blood. Arise, O Paul, who by thy teaching and death hast and dost illumine the Church. Arise, all ye saints, and the whole universal Church, whose interpretation of Scripture has been assailed. We can scarcely express our grief over the ancient heresies which have been revived in Germany. We are the more downcast because she was always in the forefront of the war on heresy. Our pastoral office can no longer tolerate the pestiferous (pernicious) virus of the following forty-one errors. [They are enumerated.] We can no longer suffer the serpent to



The Pope's *Preface* to the Bull

creep through the field of the Lord. The books of Martin Luther which contain these errors are to be examined and burned. As for Martin himself, good God, what office of paternal love have we omitted in order to recall him from his errors? Have we not offered him a safe conduct and money for the journey? [Such an offer never reached Luther.] And he has had the temerity to appeal to a future council although our predecessors, Pius II and Julius II, subjected such appeals to the penalties of heresy. Now therefore we give Martin sixty days in which to submit, dating from the time of the publication of this bull in his district. Anyone who presumes to infringe our excommunication and anathema will stand under the wrath of Almighty God and the apostles Peter and Paul.”

The Pope's Letter to Frederick the Wise

- It was written on July 8, 1520, after his papal bull was sent to Luther.
- He expresses his frustration: "We cannot suffer the scabby sheep longer to infect the flock."
- He reports to Frederick about the bull which has been sent to Luther: "We have composed a bull, sealed with lead, in which out of the innumerable errors of this man we have selected those in which he perverts the faith, seduces the simple, and relaxes the bonds of obedience, continence, and humility."
- Leo X's demand: "We exhort you to induce him to return to sanity and receive our clemency. If he persists in his madness, take him captive."

Diarmaid MacCulloch

The three pamphlets of 1520 represented “an astonishing creative achievement, a harnessing of the fury which he now felt at the rejection of the good news and urgent advice he had offered the Holy Father. All three books showed how far the acute conflict of 1519-1520 with the authorities in the Church had pushed him to think new thoughts.”





1: *Address to the Christian Nobility*

- The full title: *An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to the Amelioration of the State of Christendom.*
- It was written in the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg and published in German on June 23, 1520.
- Luther called upon the ruling class to reform the Church (and all society), acknowledging that the Church would not reform itself. The government should deprive the pope of all political rights.
- Heretics should be overcome with arguments, not fire.
- 4,000 copies of the first edition were sold within three weeks; many other editions followed.

2. *The Babylon Captivity of the Church*

- *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* was written in Latin and published on October 6, 1520.
- He summarized his theology, condemned the papacy for holding the church in captivity by distorting the original meaning of the sacraments (believed there were only two), spoke about the priesthood of all believers, and drew conclusions from justification by faith alone.
- The treatise was translated into German and was widely circulated.
- It drew a stern rebuke from Henry VIII of England.



3. *The Freedom of the Christian Man*

- *The Freedom of the Christian Man* was written in Latin for the pope in October, 1520, and came out in German in November.
- It was Luther's last attempt to seek peace with the Church.
- In sum, it was a confession of his own faith and of the evangelical way of life as given by the Apostle Paul.
- It contained no retraction of any of his doctrines.
- The freedom a true Christian, according to Luther, consists of his emancipation from a reliance on works, institutional formalism, etc.



The Bull Reaches Luther

- On October 10, the papal bull reached Luther.
- Luther wrote to Spalatin: “This bull condemns Christ himself. It summons me not to an audience but to a recantation...The faith and the Church are at stake. I rejoice to suffer in so noble a cause. I am not worthy of so holy a trial. I feel much freer now that I am certain the pope is Antichrist...”
- Luther replied to the bull in Latin in an essay entitled *Against the Execrable Bull of Antichrist*, in which he said, “Whoever wrote this bull, he is Antichrist;” “I dissent from the damnation of this bull;” and “I curse and execrate it as a sacrilege and blasphemy of Christ, God’s Son and our Lord.”



Luther's Reply to Leo X

“You then, Leo X, you cardinals and the rest of you at Rome, I tell you to your faces: ‘If this bull has come out in your name, then I will use the power which has been given me in baptism whereby I became a son of God and co-heir with Christ, established upon the rock against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. I call upon you to renounce your diabolical blasphemy and audacious impiety, and, if you will not, we shall all hold your seat as possessed and oppressed by Satan, the damned seat of Antichrist, in the name of Jesus Christ, whom you persecute.’ But my zeal carries me away. I am not yet persuaded that the bull is by the pope but rather by that apostle of impiety, John Eck.”



Luther Burns the Bull

- The sixty days of grace was from the time the bull was received by Luther, October 10.
- This meant he had until December 10 to submit.
- On that day, Melanchthon issued an invitation to the faculty and students of the University of Wittenberg to assemble at 10:00 a.m. at the Elster gate to burn the papal constitutions, the canon law, and works of scholastic theology.
- Luther himself threw the papal bull into the fire.
- The faculty went home, but the students sang the *Te Deum* and burned the works of John Eck and other opponents.



Luther burns the papal bull in the Wittenberg Square in 1520

Karl Aspelin (1857-1922)



An Important Epoch in the Reformation

“The dispute at Leipzig had inwardly detached Luther from the pope. But the moment in which he burned the bull was that in which he declared in the most formal manner his entire separation from the Bishop of Rome and his church, and his attachment to the universal Church, such as it had been founded by the apostles of Jesus Christ. At the Eastern gate of the city, he lit up a fire that has been burning for three centuries” (now, five).

- D'Aubigne, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther* (written in the 1840's)

Luther burning the
papal bull of
excommunication,
with vignettes from
Luther's life and
portraits of Hus,
Savonarola, Wycliffe,
Cruciger,
Melanchthon,
Bugenhagen, Gustav
Adolf, and Bernhard,
Duke of Saxe-Weimar

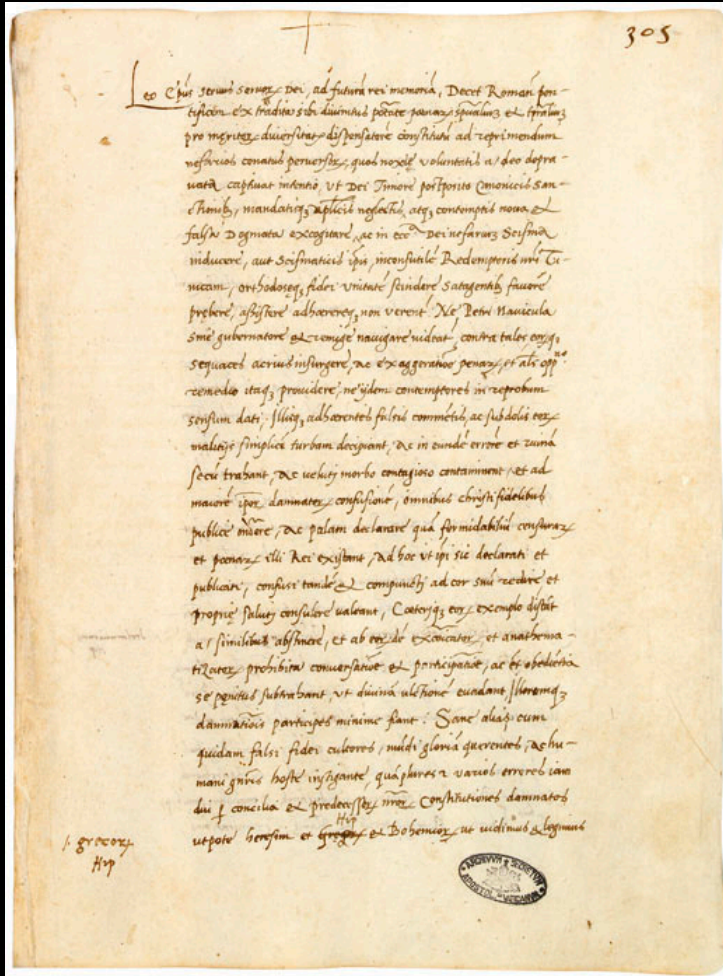




Luther's Justification

- “Since they have burned my books, I burn theirs. The canon law was included because it makes the pope a god on earth. So far I have merely fooled with this business of the pope. All my articles condemned by Antichrist are Christian. Seldom has the pope overcome anyone with Scripture and with reason.”
- Frederick the Wise wrote to the Emperor, Charles V: “Luther’s books had been illegally burned. He ought not, indeed, to have retaliated, but the emperor should wink at the affront in view of the provocation.” He told the emperor that Luther should be excused for not only the papal bull, but the entire canon law.

Decet Romanum Pontificem



The title means *It is Fitting That the Pope*. Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church on January 3, 1521, four years after the outbreak of the indulgence controversy.