

## Primary source study

*On the Freedom of the Christian Man by Martin Luther*

### Glossary of terms

- a. **Augustinian.** After almost being struck by lightning in 1505, Luther joined this Catholic order to become a monk because it was the most rigorous order in his area.
- b. **Pope Leo X** (1475-1521). Appointed pope in March 1513. He “personified the Renaissance”, increased Papal spending and renewed indulgences to support the building of St Peters (Clouse, 1978, p. 591).
- c. **Curia** (Roman Curia). The Papal court which has oversight of both the Papal State and the Church. It is broken into three main areas: the Apostolic Chamber, the Chancery and the Sacra Rota (Wallace, 2012, pp. 38-39).
- d. **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153). A contemplative mystic and social activist who was a prominent “figure in twelfth-century Latin Christendom.” He shifted the focus of teaching from God’s judgement to God’s love and salvation for all repentant sinners. He raised the profile of praying to the Virgin Mary (Pierard, 1978, p. 123).
- e. **See/Apostolic See.** Office held by a lineage of successors that is believed to originate with the Apostle Peter.
- f. **Johann Eck** (1486-1543). Catholic scholar and orator who opposed Luther and Karlstadt at Leipzig in 1519. He was Luther’s most active opponent; participated in Hagenau (1540), Worms (1541) and Ratisbon (1541) (Meyer, 1978, p. 326).
- g. **Cardinal.** Senior church leader, normally a bishop who may oversee a branch of the Roman Curia.
- h. **Nuncio.** Church diplomat, like an ambassador for the Church
- i. **Electo Frederick** (1463-1525). founded the University of Wittenberg in 1502 which Luther attended. He intervened to have Luther’s trial moved to Augsburg in Germany and provided refuge for Luther in Wartburg after the Diet of Worms (1521) (Toon, 1978, p. 390).

j. **Dr Karlstadt** (1477-1541). Initially was an opponent to Luther, but after reading Augustine changed his mind. Debated Johann Eck alongside Luther. Later Luther debated him regarding his extreme reformed views (Clouse, 1978, p. 193).

k. **Karl Miltitz** (1490-1529). Papal nuncio who was to meet with Luther over 1518-1519 to try to reconcile Luther with the church. He wrote to the Pope saying Luther would recant, this failed (Armstrong, 1978, p. 661).

l. **Cajetan** (1464-1534). Dominican cardinal and philosopher who failed to persuade Luther to recant in 1518 at Augsburg and was “one of Luther’s most competent opponents” (Catherall, 1978, p. 174).

### **Short Essay**

The *Freedom of the Christian Man* by Martin Luther is a fundamental document of the reformation (Helfferrich, 2013, p. xxiv). It is classed as a treatise, which is an extended formal essay or discourse on one subject, or a short book.

Attached to this work is an open letter to Pope Leo X, who is the imagined audience for this discourse. There is no evidence that Leo read this work (Helfferrich, 2013, p. 1). The work was written in both Latin and German, with the German version written for a popular audience to expand its reach beyond the clergy (Helfferrich, 2013, pp. xxvii, 1).

Luther wrote *Freedom of a Christian* when he was facing possible martyrdom (Mullett, 2004, p. 117). On June 15 1520, a Papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, was issued giving Luther 60 days to renounce. He wrote this work in the autumn of 1520 (Mullett, 2004, p. 115). The bull was issued after earlier representatives of the church, Cajetan and Eck, were unsuccessful in forcing Luther to recant his views about scripture and the church. Luther was being questioned because he had previously posted his famous 95 theses in Wittsburg that were a response to the selling of indulgences.

Pope Leo X wanted to rebuild St Peters in Rome. In order to raise the funds he issued the selling of indulgences in areas where it was not illegal. In Germany, Tetzel, a Dominican

friar, sold indulgences with great vigour, most likely to pay off his clerical position he had bought (simony). Tetzel was selling indulgences in a neighbouring region to Luther.

Members of Luther's church were travelling over the border to purchase indulgences. This caused Luther to write up 95 theses about the practice of indulgences and other reforms the church should take. This was written in Latin for the clergy to read, but was soon translated into German and Luther's ideas became widespread.

Cajetan from Rome was sent to Augsburg in 1518 to persuade Luther to recant. Cajetan got Luther to admit he disagreed with two previous Popes, one who instigated indulgences and another who introduced the treasury of merit. The next year Eck, a German met with Luther at Leipzig to debate him and Karlstade on their views of scripture. Eck drew parallels between Luther and John Hus who was declared a heretic by a church council. Luther then stated that scripture not only trumped Popes but church councils as well. A bull declaring him *Exsurge Domine* (Arise O Lord) was issued in June 15 1520 giving him 60 days to recant, instead he burnt the bull on 10 December 1520.

Miltitz thought Luther would recant of his views and persuaded him to write a letter to the Pope on 12 October 1520. That letter became the preface to this work. On the surface it is cordial towards the Pope (Mullett, 2004, p. 115). However, underneath its formalities, Luther proposes the abolishment of the papacy (Marius, 1999, p. 266).

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