
The Erasmus Reader

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TO THE MOST REVEREND IN CHRIST ALBERT, CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP,
MARGRAVE ETC, FROM ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, THEOLOGIAN,
GREETING

... If the stormy seas of business have left your Eminence any leisure, there are several things which it is in my interest that you should know, and perhaps also it is in your own; certainly it is in the interest of humane letters, which should always receive the support of good men against bad. The first point I must make is this, that I have never had any connection either with Reuchlin's business¹ or with the case of Luther. Cabbala and Talmud,² whatever they may be, have never appealed to me. Those venomous conflicts between Reuchlin and the supporters of Jacob of Hoogstraten I have always found extremely offensive. Of Luther I know as little as I do of anyone; his books I have not yet found time to read, except for dipping into some of them here and there. If he has written well, none of the credit is due to me; if the reverse, there is nothing that can be laid at my door. One thing I do see: it is the best men who take least offence at what he writes, not because they approve of everything, I imagine, but because they read him in the spirit in which we read Cyprian and Jerome, or even Peter Lombard,³ turning a blind eye to many things.

That Luther's books were published, distressed me; and when some short pieces, I forget which, began to be handed about, I did my best to prevent their publication, for this reason especially, that I was afraid they would give rise to disorders. Luther had written to me, in a very Christian spirit in my opinion, and in my answer I urged him in passing to publish no sedition, nothing derogatory to the Roman pontiff, nothing arrogant or vindictive, but to preach the gospel teaching in sincerity with all mildness. I did this courteously, in hopes it would have more effect. I added that there were some here who supported him, in order to persuade him more readily to adapt himself to their advice. These words have been read by some blockheads to mean that I supported Luther, though none of them have yet told him where he is wrong and I alone did tell him. I do not accuse Luther, I do not defend him, nor am I answerable for him. On the man's spirit I would not dare pass judgment; for this is a most difficult task, especially if the verdict is to

be adverse. And yet, if I supported him as a man of high character, which even his enemies admit; as a man on trial, and even jurors on oath are allowed to pity without breaking the law; as a victim of persecution, which common humanity dictates – and persecution too by those who have found a trumped-up pretext to make a fanatical attack on the humanities – where in all this would there be grounds for suspicion, provided I did not meddle with the case? Last but not least, it is, I imagine, my Christian duty to support Luther to this extent: if he is innocent, I should be sorry to see him overwhelmed by some villainous faction; if he is wrong, I would rather he were set right than destroyed; for this agrees better with the example Christ has given us, who according to the prophet⁴ quenched not the smoking flax and did not break the bruised reed.

I should like to see that heart of his, which does appear to hound some glowing sparks of the gospel teaching, not overwhelmed but set right, and then invited to preach the glory of Christ. As it is, certain divines well known to me neither correct Luther nor instruct him; they merely traduce him with their crazy clamour before popular audiences and tear him to shreds with the most bitter and venomous denunciations, their mouths full of nothing but the words 'heresy' and 'heretics.' It cannot be denied that the most invidious attacks have been made on him here in public by men who have not yet set eyes on his books. It is a known fact that some have condemned specifically what they still did not understand. Here is an instance. Luther had put in writing that we are not bound to confess all our mortal sins but only those which are manifest, meaning by manifest those which were known to us when we made our confession. A certain Carmelite divine,⁵ understanding this as though manifest meant openly committed, made a portentous uproar over something he had not understood. It is a known fact that these men have condemned as heretical in Luther's books things they read in the books of Bernard and Augustine as orthodox and even pious.

I told them at the beginning to refrain from this kind of public clamour and to proceed by preference in writing or by disputation. First, I said, a thing ought not to be condemned in public which has not been read or, rather, not considered – for I will not say not understood; secondly, that it was unseemly for theologians to use

disorder as a weapon, for their decisions ought to be a serious matter; lastly, that it was not easy to rant and rail against a man whose life all know to be blameless. And then perhaps, I said, it was not safe to touch on such topics before a mixed crowd containing many people who much dislike confessing their secret sins. If they hear that there are divines who say we are not bound to confess all our sins, they will snatch eagerly at this excuse for a quite erroneous opinion.

Although this view of mine was shared by all the most intelligent people, yet my friendly warning gave rise to the suspicion that Luther's books were largely mine, and born in Louvain; while there is not a letter in them that belongs to me or was published with my knowledge or consent. And yet, relying on this utterly base suspicion, and being beyond the reach of any protest, they roused the most tragical scenes here, which were the most frenzied things I have yet seen in my whole life. Besides which, although a theologian's proper duty is to teach, I now seem many of them intent on nothing but compulsion or destruction and annihilation; though Augustine, even when confronted with the Donatists,⁶ who were not only heretics but brutal ruffians as well, disapproves of coercion without instruction too. Men in whom gentleness was most to be expected seem to thirst for nothing but human blood, and are all agape for nothing so much as to seize Luther and destroy him. This is to play the butcher, not the theologian. If they wish to prove themselves eminent divines, let them convert the Jews, let them convert to Christ those who are now far from him, let them mend the standard of morality among Christians, which is as corrupt as anything even the Turks can show. How can it be right to hale off to punish a man who, in the first place, put forward subjects for discussion which have always been discussed in all schools of theology, and have even given rise to doubts? Why should a man be tormented and have even given rise to doubts? Why should a man be tormented who wishes for instruction, who submits himself to the judgment of the Apostolic See, who entrusts himself to the judgment of the universities? If he does not put himself in the hands of certain people who would rather see him dead than right, we should not be surprised.

Above all, we must look clearly at the sources of this evil. The world is burdened with ordinances made by man. It is burdened with the opinions and the dogmas of the schools. It is burdened with the tyranny of the mendicant friars who, though they are servants of the Roman See, have risen to such influence and such numbers that the

pope himself – yes, even kings themselves – find them formidable. To them, when the pope is on their side, he is more than God; in things which are not to their advantage, he has no more substance than a dream. I do not condemn them all; but there are very many of this description who, for gain and for despotic power, deliberately ensnare the consciences of men. With growing effrontery they now began to leave Christ out of it and preach nothing but their own new and increasingly impudent dogmas. Of indulgences they were speaking in such terms that even the unlettered could not stomach it. This and much like it little by little was sapping the vigour of the gospel teaching; and the result would have been, with things slipping always from bad to worse, that the spark of Christian piety, from which alone the spent fire of charity could be rekindled, would be finally put out. The centre of religion was tending to be a more than Jewish ceremonial.⁷ Hence there is sorrow and sighing among men of good will. And all this is admitted in private conversation even by theologians if they are not monks, and by certain monks themselves.

It was these things, I think, that roused Luther's spirit to take the first bold step of opposing the intolerable impudence of some of them. What else am I to suppose of a man who does not seek high place and has no desire for money? Of the articles on which they base their charges against Luther I enter into no discussion for the moment, I discuss merely the manner and occasion. Luther made bold to doubt about indulgences; but this was a subject on which others previously had made brazen assertions. He made bold to speak, with some moderation, of the power of the Roman pontiff; but on this the other party had previously written with no moderation at all, the leaders of them being three Dominicans,⁸ Alvarus, Silvester, and the cardinal of San Sisto. He made bold to condemn the pronouncements of Thomas [Aquinas]; but these the Dominicans set almost above the Gospels. He made bold to discuss some doubtful points on the subject of confession; but this is a subject on which the monks set endless traps for men's consciences. He made bold to neglect in part the pronouncements of the schools; but to these they themselves give too much weight, and on them they differ none the less among themselves, and finally they change them from time to time, tearing up the old to bring in new. This was torment to religious minds, when they heard scarcely a word in the schools about the gospel teaching, and those sainted

authors who had long ago been accepted by the church dismissed as out of date. Worse, in sermons they heard very little about Christ; almost everything concerned the powers of the papacy and the opinions of modern authorities, and all the preachers said now flaunted openly the money-grubber and the toady, the place-hunter and the charlatan. It is their fault, I think, even if Luther was rather too intemperate. Whoever is a supporter of the gospel teaching is a supporter of the Roman pontiff, who is its principal mouthpiece, while the other bishops are his mouthpieces in their turn. All bishops are Christ's vicegerents, but among them the Roman pontiff is the chief. Of him we must suppose that he supports nothing more than the glory of Christ, whose minister he boasts himself to be. Those men do him the greatest disservice who ascribe to him in adulation what he does not himself accept and what is not expedient for Christ's flock. And yet some of those who stir up these tragic commotions do it out of no zeal for the pope; they misuse his position to enhance their own interests and their own despotic power. We have, I should suppose, a pious pope, but in such a stormy sea of business there is much of which he is unaware; some things too which he cannot restrain even if he would, but, as Virgil⁹ says, 'The driver's steeds now carry him away./ Nor will the chariot the reins obey.' And so the pope's pious duty can only be assisted by a man who encourages truly Christian behaviour. It is no secret that there are people who seek to arouse his holy fervour against Luther, or rather against anyone who dares open his mouth in opposition to their favourite ideas. But the greatest princes ought to consider the pope's abiding wishes, and not his acquiescence secured by force or fraud.

Indeed I could show you with perfect truth what sort of men are at the bottom of this tumult, did I not fear that while I try always to be truthful I may be thought merely spiteful. Many of them I know well; many have themselves displayed their true quality in the books they have published – nor does any mirror give a clearer image of a man's mind and life. If only those who assume for themselves the censorial staff, to purge the Christian body of whom they please, as the ancient censors purged the senate, had thoroughly absorbed Christ's teaching and Christ's spirit! This happy state is reserved for those hearts from which all the contamination of this world's desires has been cleared away. Whether the men we treat of are in this class will soon be discovered by anyone who does business with them on any point that

touches their pockets, their ambition, or their love of revenge. I wish I could indicate to your Highness what I have both observed and been told upon this subject; for I must not forget the self-restraint proper to a Christian.

I say this all the more freely because I am in every way a stranger to both Reuchlin's case and Luther's. I should not be willing to write anything in that field myself, nor do I claim to possess sufficient learning to be ready to keep an eye on what other men write; but I cannot refrain from letting you into one secret – that those people have very different objects in view from those that their words profess. They have long resented the new blossoming of the humanities and the ancient tongues, and the revival of the authors of Antiquity, who up to now were wormeaten and deep in dust, so that the world is now recalled to the fountain-head. They are afraid for their own shortcomings, they do not wish it to be thought that there is anything they do not know, and they fear their own prestige may suffer. This is a sore place that they have long kept under, but pain proves too much for pretence, and it has lately burst. Before Luther's books appeared, they devoted great efforts to this, especially the Dominicans and the Carmelites, many of whom, I regret to say, are even more criminal than they are ignorant. When Luther's books had appeared, as though this gave them a handle they began to tie up the ancient tongues and the humanities and Reuchlin and Luther and even myself in the same parcel, their distinctions being as much at sea as their deductions. To begin with, what can liberal studies have in common with a question of religious faith? And then what have I in common with Reuchlin or with Luther? But they have cunningly confused all these things, to lay on all who follow the humanities a load of ill will which all share.

Further, that this campaign is dishonest, this alone is enough to show: they themselves admit that there is no author ancient or modern in whom mistakes may not be found, and would even make a man who defended those mistakes assiduously a heretic, and why, if so, do they probe so insidiously into two or three and ignore the rest? They do not deny that there are many errors in Alvarus, many in the cardinal of San Sisto, and many in Silvester Prierias.¹⁰ These are not mentioned, because they are Dominicans. Reuchlin alone is the object of their clamour, because of his skill in languages, and Luther, whom they suppose to be equipped with the subjects that I study, although in fact his acquaintance with them is but slender. Luther has written much

which is not so much irreligious as ill advised; and of this what hurts their feelings worst of all is that he does not attach much importance to Thomas [Aquinas], that he reduces the profit to be made from indulgences, that he does not think much of the orders of mendicants, that he does not pay to the decisions of the schools the same respect as he pays to the Gospels, and that he thinks the man-made subtleties of academic disputation can be ignored. These, we can all see, are insufferable heresies. Yet these they gloss over in the presence of the pope and produce charges loaded with prejudice; only the chance of hurting someone calls out all their unanimity and cunning.

In the old days a heretic was listened to almost with respect and was absolved if he did penance; if he remained obdurate after conviction, he was not admitted – that was the extreme penalty – to communion with catholics in the bosom of the church. Nowadays the accusation of heresy is a very different thing; and yet on the slightest pretext at once they are all crying, 'Heresy, heresy.' In the old days a heretic was one who dissented from the Gospels or the articles of the faith or things which carried equal authority with them. Nowadays if anyone disagrees with Thomas, he is called a heretic – indeed, if he disagrees with some newfangled reasoning thought up yesterday by some sophister in the schools. Anything they do not like, anything they do not understand is heresy. To know Greek is heresy; to speak like an educated man is heresy. Anything they do not do themselves is heresy. It is, I admit, a serious crime to violate the faith; but not everything should be forced into a question of faith. And those who mind the business of the faith ought to steer very clear of every kind of ambition for personal gain or hatred or revenge.

But anyone can see the goal they have set before them and the way they are heading. And if their greed is once allowed free rein, they will begin to show their resentment against all good men everywhere, and will end by threatening the very bishops, even the pope himself. I should not protest if this were to be thought untrue, except that we have seen some of them doing this already. How far the Order of Preachers can go, to produce no other example, we can learn from Girolamo Savaronella and that outrage at Bern.¹¹ I have no wish to refresh the memory of their disgrace; I issue a warning of what we must expect if all their rash attempts succeed.

All that I have said hitherto lies outside Luther's case; I discuss

only their methods and the danger of them. Reuchlin's case has been reserved to himself by the pope. Luther's business has been delegated to the universities. Whatever they may pronounce will be free of all risk for me. I have always taken pains to write nothing indecent or seditious or at variance with the teaching of Christ. I shall never knowingly be either a teacher of error or a promoter of civil strife, for I will suffer anything rather than arouse sedition. But I had my reasons for wishing this to be known to your Eminence, not to give you good advice or show you the way, but so that, if the adversaries of the humanities attempt to misuse your great position, you may know more surely what the best decision in this field is. And in my opinion, the more your Eminence can keep clear of this case, the more you will honourably preserve your own tranquillity. The *Method*¹² which I dedicated to your Highness, I have revised, and enriched with considerable additions. May Christ the Almighty ever preserve your Eminence in health and wealth.

Louvain, 19 October 1519

Your Eminence's most obedient servant Erasmus of Rotterdam

Ep 1202

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM TO JUSTUS JONAS, GREETING

There has been a persistent rumour here for some time, dearest Jonas, that you gave Martin Luther steadfast support at Worms,¹ and I do not doubt that as a truly religious man you did as I should have done had I been there, in hopes of laying this tragic business to rest by moderate measures in a way that may prevent its breaking out again later with more disastrous results for the whole world. Personally, I am surprised that this did not happen; the best men had it very much at heart for, as befits truly Christian spirits, they wanted steps to be taken for the peace of the church, which if not held together in concord has ceased to deserve the name of church. For what is our religion, if not peace in the Holy Spirit? Moreover, the church of Christ, inasmuch as she still holds good and bad fish in the same net and is compelled to endure tares mixed with the wheat, suffered even in the old days from great faults, as orthodox Fathers testify, deploring from time to time the gross corruption of the ranks of society whence models of simple piety ought to proceed. And how far the church of Rome fell away even in

Julius Excluded from Heaven / *Dialogus Julius exclusus e coelis*

The attribution of the *Julius exclusus* to Erasmus is problematic. The work first appeared in 1517/18 and was variously attributed to the poet Fausto Andrelini, to Ulrich von Hutten, and to the Italian adventurer Girolamo Balbi, but the majority of Erasmus' contemporaries and most modern scholars regard Erasmus as the author of the dialogue. Erasmus himself admitted that the style resembled his own. He never denied the authorship outright, but disavowed any connection with the publication of the piece. Significantly he maintained that those who brought such scandalous stuff before the public were more to blame than those who actually wrote it.

The subject of the dialogue, Julius II (pope 1503–13), was famous for his patronage of the arts and infamous for his immoral life and warmongering. The dialogue, which satirizes his worldly ambitions and his abuse of power, was immensely popular with readers. It saw thirteen editions within four years and was quickly translated into German, English, and French, thus becoming available to a large audience.

This extract is taken from CWE 27 168–97, translated and annotated by Michael J. Heath.

JULIUS EXCLUDED FROM HEAVEN: A DIALOGUE

Julius What the devil is this? The doors won't open? Someone must have changed the lock, or at least tampered with it.

Genius Are you quite sure you haven't brought the wrong key? The key to your treasure-chest won't open this door – and anyway, why didn't you bring both of them with you? The one in your hand is the key of power, not of knowledge.

Julius This is the only one I've ever had and, as I've got it here, I don't see what use the other would be.

Genius Neither do I, except that we're shut out without it.

Julius I'm seething with anger. I'll bang on the doors. Hey! Hey!

Someone open this door at once! What's the matter? No one here? What's keeping the doorman? Snoring, I suppose, good and drunk.

Genius He judges everyone by his own standards.

Peter It's a good thing our gate is as solid as rock or he'd have broken the doors down, whoever he is. This must be some giant or paladin, some wrecker of cities. Immortal God! it smells like a sewer round here! I won't open the door directly, but I'll peep through the bars of this window and find out what kind of monster it is. Who are you? What do you want?

Julius I want you to open the doors, and quickly; if you did your job properly, you'd have come out to meet me – with a solemn procession of angels, too.

Peter He's domineering enough anyway! But first of all, tell me who you are.

Julius As if you can't see that for yourself.

Peter See for myself? Well, I can see a strange spectacle, or perhaps I should say monster, unlike anything I've ever seen before.

Julius But I imagine that unless you're quite blind you recognize this key, even if the golden oak¹ isn't familiar; and you can see my triple crown and my robe all glittering with gold and jewels.

Peter Yes, the silver key is vaguely familiar, but there's only one and it's very different from those which Christ, the true shepherd of the church, entrusted to me long ago. As for that sumptuous crown of yours, why on earth should I recognize it? No barbarian tyrant ever dared wear a thing like that, let alone anyone trying to get in here. I'm certainly not impressed by the robe, because I always scorned gold and jewels and trampled them like so much rubble. But what's this? I see that all your equipment, key, crown, and robe, bears the marks of that villainous huckster and imposter, who had my name but not my nature, Simon, whom I humbled long ago with the aid of Christ.

Julius Stop this nonsense, if you know what's good for you; for your information, I am Julius, the famous Ligurian;² and, unless you've completely forgotten your alphabet, I'm sure you recognize these two letters, P.M.

Peter I suppose they stand for Pestis Maxima.³

Genius Ha ha ha! Our soothsayer has hit the nail on the head!

Julius Of course not! Pontifex Maximus.⁴

Peter Well, you could be thrice Maximus but you can't come in here unless you're holy.

Julius Oh, if being called 'holy' has anything to do with it, it's most impertinent of you to take so long to open the doors; you may have been merely styled 'holy' or 'saint' for all these years, but everyone has always called me 'most holy.' There are thousands of bulls ...

Genius 'Cock-and-bulls,' you might say!

Julius ... in which I am many times called 'most holy lord'; in fact, I was always referred to as 'his Holiness,' not just 'holy,' so that whatever I fancied doing ...

Genius Even when he was drunk!

Julius ... people said that 'his Holiness, the most holy Lord Julius' had done it.

Peter Then ask your flatterer to let you into heaven, since they made you 'most holy,' and let those who gave you 'Holiness' grant you bliss as well. Do you really think there's no difference between being holy and being called holy?

Julius This is very annoying: if I'd only been allowed to go on living I wouldn't envy you your holiness or your bliss.

Peter How well your words reveal the holiness of your thoughts! But in any case, I've been watching you closely all this time, and I can see plenty of evidence of impiety, but none of saintliness. What, for instance, is the purpose of that strange escort of yours, so unlike a Pope's? You've brought twenty thousand men with you, but not one of the whole mob even looks like a Christian to me. They seem to be the worst dregs of humanity, all stinking of brothels, booze, and gunpowder. I'd say they were a gang of hired thugs, or rather goblins of Tartarus plucked up from hell to wage war on heaven. And the more closely I look at you yourself the less I can see any trace of an apostle. First of all, what monstrous new fashion is this, to wear the dress of a priest on top, while underneath it you're all bristling and clanking with blood-stained armour? Then again, what fierce eyes and stubborn mouth, what a fearsome expression and haughty and arrogant brow you have! I'm ashamed to say, and sorry to see, that your whole body is disfigured by the marks of monstrous and abominable appetites, not to mention that even now you're all belches and that you stink of boozing and hangovers and look as if you've just thrown

up. Your whole body is in such a state that I should guess that it's been wasted, withered, and rotted less by old age and illness than by drink. **Genius** A fine portrait: Julius to the life!

Peter Oh, I know you've been glowering at me for some time, but I can't help saying what I think. I suspect that you are that poisonous pagan Julius,⁵ returned from hell in disguise to mock me, so closely do all your features resemble his.

Julius *Ma di sji*⁶

Peter What's that?

Genius He's in a temper: whenever he said that, all the cardinals would scurry away, for fear of feeling his Holiness's stick, especially after a banquet.

Peter You seem to understand his meaning very well: tell me, who are you?

Genius I am the mighty Genius of Julius.

Peter The evil genius, I should say.

Genius Whatever I am, I belong to Julius.

Julius Will you stop all this nonsense, and open the doors? Or would you rather they were broken down? Why all this chatter? You can see the kind of men I have under my command ...

Peter Yes indeed, I can see your gang of seasoned cutthroats, but, in case you don't know, you must storm these doors with very different arms.

Julius Enough talk, I say! If you don't obey me, and quickly, I'll hurl my thunderbolt of excommunication, even at you; I used to terrify the mightiest kings and even whole kingdoms with it. Do you see this bull already drawn up for the purpose?

Peter What on earth is all this about frightful thunderbolts and lightning and bulls and other fine talk? Christ never told us anything about these.

Julius Do as you're told, or you'll find out.

Peter You may have frightened men once with such fantasies, but they're no use in this place: only truth counts here. This citadel may be taken by good deeds, not foul words. But one question: you threaten *me* with your thunderbolt of excommunication; by what right?

Julius The best of rights, since you no longer hold office and are no

more than a simple priest; no, not even a priest, as you haven't the power to consecrate.

Peter Because I'm dead, I suppose?

Julius Exactly.

Peter But by the same token you have no more power over me than a dead man.

Julius Ah, but as long as the cardinals are wrangling over electing a new pope, I'm still in charge.

Genius He's still dreaming the dreams of life.

Julius Now open up, I say.

Peter And I say that you won't get anywhere unless you give an account of your merits.

Julius What merits?

Peter I'll explain. Were you eminent in theology?

Julius Certainly not: I hadn't time, I was too busy with my wars. But there are plenty of monks occupied with it, if that's any good to you.

Peter Well, did you win many souls for Christ by the saintliness of your life?

Genius He sent a good many to Tartarus.⁷

Peter Were you famous for your miracles?

Julius This is all old-fashioned stuff.

Peter Did you pray simply and regularly?

Julius What's he jabbering about? Lot of nonsense!

Peter Did you mortify the flesh by fasting and vigils?

Genius I'd give up, if I were you; there's no point; you're wasting your time on him.

Peter I don't know what other qualities make an outstanding pope. If he has some more apostolic one, let him tell me.

Julius Although it's demeaning for the ever-invincible Julius to give in to Peter who was, to put it mildly, a mere fisherman and more or less a beggar, I'll tell you briefly so that you'll realize what a mighty prince you're sneering at. In the first place, I'm a Ligurian, not a Jew like you, although I'm sorry to say that we do have just one thing in common: I was once a bit of a seaman.

Genius Don't let it worry you, there's still an enormous difference: this Peter fished to provide food, whereas you plied your oars to get a paltry wage for yourself.

Julius In the second place, I was the nephew, by my mother, of Sixtus, a truly supreme pontiff ...

Genius Supremely sinful, he means.

Julius ... by whose special favour, and my own exertions, I first acquired wealth from the church and then rose gradually to the distinction of a cardinal's hat. After that I was tossed to and fro by many storms of misfortune and beset by appalling accidents; I was subject to epilepsy, among other maladies, and covered all over with what's called the French pox as well; finally I became an exile, hated, condemned, rejected by all, and more or less given up for lost. But I never lost hope of becoming supreme pontiff. That showed true strength of character, whereas you, scared by the words of a maidservant, gave up at once. A woman took your courage away, but it was a woman, a prophetess or fortune-teller, who increased my confidence; in the midst of all my troubles, she secretly whispered in my ear: 'Stand fast, son of the Julii! Do no be wearied by all that you must do and suffer: some day you shall be honoured with the triple crown. You shall be king of kings and lord of lords!' Well, neither my own hopes nor her prophecy misled me, for against all the odds I fought my way up to this position, partly with the help of the French, who took me in as a fugitive, and partly with the aid of an immense amount of money; I raised this both by paying high rates of interest and also by using my wits...

Peter What does *that* mean?

Julius It means that I promised benefices in return for cash, and took great care to find guarantors for it, seeing that Crassus⁸ himself could hardly have raised so much ready cash all at once. But it's no use telling you all this, when not even all the bankers understand it. Now you know how I reached my position. But since then, as pope, I have managed affairs so well that the church, and Christ himself, owe more to me than any previous pope, even the more recent ones, to say nothing of the early ones who, in my opinion, were popes in name only.

Genius The brute makes a fine Thraso,⁹ doesn't he?

Peter I can hardly wait to hear the whole story.

Julius Well, I invented a lot of new offices, as they're called, and considerably enriched the papal treasury. Then I found a way of selling bishoprics without falling into the sin of simony. It had been established

by my predecessors that anyone appointed to a bishopric must resign his other offices. I interpreted this as follows: 'You are told to resign, but you cannot resign something you don't possess, and so you must buy something to resign.' By this device single bishoprics used to bring in six or seven thousand ducats¹⁰ each, apart from the usual extortions for the bulls. Again, I collected no mean profit from the new currency with which I flooded Italy. I've never missed an opportunity to pile up more money, because I understand only too well that nothing sacred or profane, can be done properly without it.

But to come to greater achievements: Bologna had been taken over by the Bentivogli, but I restored it to the see of Rome. I crushed the previously invincible Venetians in battle. I almost lured the duke of Ferrara into a trap, after harassing him for years with war.¹¹ I cleverly frustrated a schismatic synod with a bogus counter-council¹² and, as the saying goes, used one nail to drive out another. Finally, I completely rid Italy of the French, at that time the terror of the whole world. I would have thrown the Spaniards¹³ out too (I was on my way), had not the Fates snatched me from the earth.

In all this, too, I displayed my invincible courage, as you will see: when the French held the upper hand, I began to look for a place to hide. My situation was very nearly desperate, and I was growing a white beard, when suddenly the golden news was brought that several thousand Frenchmen had been slain at Ravenna. Julius breathed again. Another time I was virtually given up for dead, even by myself, for three days; but once again I recovered against all expectations, even my own. So either my authority or my cunning has proved so irresistible that today there is not one Christian king whom I have not incited to battle, after breaking, tearing, and shattering all the treaties by which they had painstakingly come to agreement among themselves; why, I so thoroughly ruined the most recent treaty, agreed at Cambrai¹⁴ between myself, the French king, the king of the Romans, and some other princes, that it is never even mentioned now.

But my finest achievement: even though I maintained so great an army, organized magnificent triumphs, presented many spectacles, and put up buildings all over the place, yet at my death I left five million ducats, and would have gone on to greater things, if the skill of my Jewish doctor, which had already prolonged my life considerably, had been able to extend it still further. Ah, if only some wizard

could restore me to life so that I could put the finishing touches to all my splendid plans! Mind you, on my deathbed I took great care to prevent any settlement of the wars I had stirred up throughout the world, and I saw to it that at least the money set aside for this purpose should be untouched: these were my last orders as I expired.

Can you now be reluctant to open the doors of heaven to a pope who has served Christ and the church so well? You'll admire me all the more when you realize that I achieved all this by the strength of my own character alone, having none of the advantages that most other people enjoy: no family connections, as not even I knew who my father was (which indeed adds to the glory of my achievement); no good looks, as everyone shuddered at my ghastly face; no learning, as that was something I never acquired; no physical strength – I've already described the state of my body to you; none of the advantages of youth, as I did all this in old age; no popular support, as everyone hated me; no mercy, since I was so ruthless myself that I even dealt harshly with those to whom other people usually show every indulgence ...

Peter What has this to do with your case?

Genius It seems hard, but it's really quite soft.

Julius ... but in the face of misfortune, of old age, of bodily weakness, in short, of gods and men, with only my courage and my money to help me, I achieved all this in a few years, and left enough unfinished business to my successors to keep them occupied for as much as ten years. This is the absolute truth about myself, though told with too much modesty; if one of my orators at Rome had embellished the tale with all the trimmings, I'd sound more like a god than a man.

Peter This whole story of yours, most invincible warrior, is so new and strange to me that I must ask you to forgive my simplicity or my inexperience, and not to resent answering some rather naive questions on individual points. Who are these fair and curly-haired youths?

Julius I was keeping them for my pleasure.

Peter And who are those dark and scarred veterans?

Julius My soldiers and captains, who met their deaths while fighting courageously for me and for the church, some in taking Bologna, many in the battle against Venice, and most of all at Ravenna; under our agreement, they all have a right to enter heaven, since some time ago I promised, in mighty bulls, that all who fought under Julius' banners

should fly straight up to heaven, no matter what sort of life they had led before.

Peter So, as far as I can make out, it was some of these who gave me so much trouble before you arrived, stopping just short of violence in their efforts to get in here, and brandishing certain leaden bulls.

Julius Am I to understand that you didn't let them in?

Peter Let them in? Certainly not, none of that sort. Christ taught me that these doors are to be opened, not to those who bring along bulls heavy with lead, but to those who have clothed the naked, fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, visited the prisoner, and taken in the stranger. And if he wished even those who prophesied, cast out devils, and worked miracles in his name to be shut out, do you really think I should let in those who only bring a bull in the name of Julius?

Julius What if I'd found out?

Peter I see: if some refugees from hell told you about it, you'd have declared war on me?

Julius More than that: I'd have excommunicated you!

Peter But go on with your account: why do you bear arms yourself?

Julius Don't pretend that you didn't know that the supreme pontiff has *two* swords;¹⁵ or would you like me to fight naked?

Peter But when I occupied the position, I knew of no sword but the sword of the spirit, the word of God.

Julius Malchus wouldn't agree that you cut off his ear without a sword,¹⁶ I imagine.

Peter I remember and I admit it. But on that occasion I was fighting for Christ my master, not for myself; for the life of the Lord, not for money or temporal power; when I fought I was not yet pontiff; I had been promised the keys, but had not yet received them; I had not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Even then, I was commanded to put up my sword, a public rebuke to show that such fighting was unworthy of a priest, and indeed of a Christian. But let's leave that for the moment. Why are you so particular about calling yourself a Liguarian, as if his nationality made any difference to a vicar of Christ?

Julius Of course it does: I consider it the height of loyalty to bring glory to my nation, and for that reason I put this title on all my coins, statues, arches, and walls.

Peter So he knows his fatherland but not his father! I thought for a moment that you were talking about the heavenly Jerusalem, father-

land of all believers, and its one Prince, whose name they wish to be hallowed, that is to be glorified. But why do you add 'nephew of Sixtus'¹⁷ by his sister? I am astonished that no such Sixtus has ever arrived here, especially as he was supreme pontiff and a relative of such a brave general as yourself. So please tell me what kind of man he was: a priest?

Julius Yes, but a fine soldier too; and he was from a distinguished order – the Franciscans, no less.

Peter I once met a Francis, the best of laymen, but he held wealth, pleasure, and ambition in utter contempt. Does that humble pauper now have such mighty lieutenants?

Julius I can see that you don't like men to better themselves: Benedict was a poor man too, but his successors are now so rich that even we are jealous of them.

Peter Splendid! But to return to this business of being Sixtus' nephew ...

Julius I'm always careful to say that, to shut the mouths of those whose assert too freely that I'm his son.

Peter Freely, but perhaps truly?

Julius Perhaps, but such a thing isn't consistent with the dignity of the pope, which is always the first consideration.

Peter Well, it seems to me that this dignity can be best served if it never lays itself open to justifiable criticism. But now, by your pontifical majesty, would you please tell me truly if the method of obtaining the papacy that you described is now the common and accepted method?

Julius There's been no other for hundreds of years, unless perhaps my successor is elected in another way. As soon as I'd obtained the papacy, you see, I saw to it that a fearsome bull was published to prevent anyone from reaching the office by a similar route. I renewed the bull just before my death. It's up to other people now to see that it works.

Peter Yes, I suppose you were the best man to define the offence. But what surprises me is that anyone can be found willing to take up the post, especially since, as you inform me, it involves so many irksome duties and can only be obtained after an arduous struggle. When I was pontiff, hardly anyone could be pressed into service as an elder or a deacon.

Julius I'm not surprised: in those days the only revenue and rewards

for the bishops were hardships, vigils, fasting, study, and, more often than not, death; but now they can get a kingdom and tyrannical power: and what man won't fight if he has the chance of a kingdom?

Peter All right: but what about Bologna? Had it renounced the faith, that it needed to be restored to the see of Rome?

Julius A pretty thought! No, nothing like that.

Peter Well, perhaps Bentivoglio's poor government was weakening the state?

Julius No, no, it was very prosperous; the city had been enlarged and improved by a lot of new building (all the more reason for me to hanker after it).

Peter I see: then had he seized power unlawfully?

Julius Not in the least: he was ruling by agreement.

Peter Then the citizens couldn't stand him as their prince?

Julius On the contrary, they were quite stubbornly attached to him; they were nearly all hostile to me.

Peter What *was* your reason then?

Julius Simply that, under his administration, our treasury got only a miserable few thousand out of all the enormous sums he collected from his citizens. But in any case, his deposition fitted in well with the plans I was making at the time. So the French, and some others who were intimidated by my thunderbolt, set to work with a will; Bentivoglio was overthrown, and I installed cardinals and bishops to run the city so that the whole of its revenue would be at the service of the Roman church. In addition, whereas previously it was he who enjoyed all the outward titles and honours due to a ruler, these days you can see our statues all over the city, read our inscriptions, salute our monuments; already Julius in stone or in bronze stands at every corner. Finally, if you'd seen the regal triumph with which I entered Bologna, I'm sure you'd pour scorn on the triumphs of such as Octavius and Scipio,¹⁸ and understand that I had good reason to fight so hard for Bologna; indeed, you'd have seen, at one and the same time, the church militant and triumphant.

Peter So, if I'm not mistaken, you achieved during your reign what Christ taught us to pray for: 'Thy kingdom come.' Now then, what have the Venetians done wrong?

Julius First of all, they were talking Greek¹⁹ to one another, and treating me more or less as a joke, hurling all sorts of accusations at me.

Peter Were they true or false?

Julius What's the difference? It's sacrilege even to whisper anything about the Roman pontiff, except in praise of him. Then again, they were handing out church livings as they thought fit; they would never allow court cases to be transferred to Rome, and would never purchase any dispensations. Need I say more? They were inflicting the most intolerable damage on the see of Rome, especially as they were also occupying a considerable portion of your patrimony.

Peter My patrimony? Whatever do you mean, patrimony? I forsook all and, naked, followed the naked Christ.

Julius I mean some towns belonging by right to the see of Rome: it was the term the most holy Fathers chose to describe that particular part of their possessions.

Peter Ah, so you take proper care of your own riches by dishonouring my memory? And you call this intolerable damage?

Julius Of course.

Peter But were their morals corrupt? Had their piety grown cold?

Julius Now, now, you're talking nonsense again. The point was that they were cheating us of countless thousands of ducats, enough to maintain a whole regiment of soldiers.

Peter Yes, of course, very damaging financially. But now, what had the duke of Ferrara²⁰ tried to do?

Julius That most ungrateful of men? The vicar of Christ Alexander²¹ held him in such esteem that he gave him his younger daughter in marriage and also, as a dowry, invested him with the most glittering authority – the fellow was in other respects worthless. But, heedless of all this kindness, the duke was forever insulting me, accusing me of simony, pederasty, and even insanity. On top of all this, he laid claim to certain taxes – not very important ones, it's true, but by no means to be overlooked by a careful shepherd.

Genius Tycoon, he means.

Julius But the real truth of the matter is that by joining his territory, with its strategic position, to our own domains I could advance the plans I was making. After his expulsion, then, I planned to confer his duchy on a relative²² of mine, a man of great energy and one willing to risk anything for the good of the church (as he showed not long ago when, with his own hands, he stabbed the cardinal of Pavía²³ for me); for my daughter's husband was satisfied with his lot.²⁴

Peter What's this? Supreme pontiffs with wives and children?

Julius No, no, not wives of their own; but what's so odd about them having children, since they're men, not eunuchs?

Peter Well, finally, what provoked that schismatic synod?

Julius It would take too long to go back to the very beginning, but I'll give you the essentials. Certain individuals had been growing weary of the Roman curia. They said that all our doings were tainted by a shameful obsession with money, by monstrous and unspeakable vices, sorcery, sacrilege, murder, and graft and simony. They said that I myself was a simoniac, a drunkard, and a lecher, obsessed with the things of the world, an absolute disaster for the Christian commonwealth, and in every way unworthy to occupy my position. The only remedy for this wretched situation, they said, was a general council. They added that I'd sworn to call a general council within two years of my accession, and that I'd been elected on this condition.

Peter Was what they said true?

Julius Indeed it was. But I'd freed myself from the oath when the time was ripe. I mean, if there's a kingdom at stake, what man would hesitate to break any sort of oath? As my alter ego Julius so elegantly put it: 'Let piety be practised in everything else.'²⁵ But now, observe the audacity of men: listen to their next move. Nine cardinals desert; they announce a council to me; they invite me; they beg me to preside. When I refuse, they proclaim the council to the whole world, on the authority of Maximilian²⁶ as emperor (because, according to them, history tells us that at one time councils were usually proclaimed by the Roman emperors), and also (I shudder to think of it) on the authority of Louis XII of France,²⁷ in this way they try to tear the seamless coat of Christ, which even those who crucified him left in one piece.

Peter But were you as bad as they claimed?

Julius Does it matter? I was supreme pontiff. Suppose I were more vicious than the Cercopes, stupider than Morychus, more ignorant than a log, fouler than Lerna:²⁸ any holder of this key of power must be venerated as the vicar of Christ and looked on as most holy.

Peter Even an obvious scoundrel?

Julius As big a scoundrel as you like. And so of course it's insufferable that the man who stands in God's place on earth and is even a kind of god among men should be taken to task or insulted by some nonentity.

Peter But common sense rebels against admiring a man whom we can plainly see is a rogue or praising a man whom we feel to be evil.

Julius People can think what they like, so long as they speak well of us or at least hold their tongues. The supreme pontiff cannot be censured, even by a general council.

Peter I'm sure of one thing: the man who stands in Christ's place on earth must make every effort to be like him, and conduct his whole life in such a way that nothing in it can be censured, and that no one can justly speak ill of him. The papacy is in a bad way when popes must force men's approval by threats rather than win it by righteousness, when only liars can praise them, and when their highest achievement is to force silence upon their detractors. But answer me this: is there no way that a sinful and pestilent pope can be removed?

Julius Ridiculous! Who could remove the supreme power?

Peter But it is precisely because he is supreme that he must be removed: the greater he is, the more damage he can do. Civil laws can not only depose an emperor for misgovernment, but even sentence him to death; how unhappy is the condition of the church if it is obliged to tolerate a subversive pontiff at Rome and cannot by any means rid itself of such a public nuisance.

Julius Ah, but if a Roman pontiff needs correction, he must be corrected by a council; no council, however, can be convened against the pope's will, otherwise it isn't a council but a synod. Even if, under pressure, a council is convened, nothing can be decided without the pope's agreement, and in the end there is always the ultimate safeguard, the absolute power by virtue of which a pope on his own is far superior to a universal council. In fact, he cannot be deprived of his jurisdiction for any crime at all.

Peter Not for murder?

Julius Not for parricide.

Peter Not for fornication?

Julius Such language! No, not even for incest.

Peter Not for unholy simony?

Julius Not even for hundreds of simoniacal acts.

Peter Not for sorcery?

Julius Not even for sacrilege.

Peter Not for blasphemy?

Julius No, I tell you.

Peter Not for all these combined in one monstrous creature?

Julius Look, you can run through a thousand other crimes if you like, all more hideous than these: the Roman pontiff still cannot be deposed for them.

Peter This is certainly a strange new concept of the Roman pontiff's position that you're teaching me if, as you say, he alone is allowed to get away with every sort of crime; even stranger is the church's misfortune if it can find no way to rid itself of such a monster, and is compelled to venerate as pope the sort of man whom no one would tolerate as a brothel-keeper.

Julius Some people do say he can be deposed for just one thing ...

Peter And what's that, I wonder? A good deed? Since he obviously can't be deposed for evil deeds, if not for any of the things I mentioned.

Julius For heresy, but only if he's publicly convicted of it. But of course that's absurd too, and can't do the slightest harm to the pope's majesty. For one thing, he has the power to abrogate the law itself, if he finds it unsatisfactory; for another, who would dare to make accusations against the supreme pontiff, especially when he's so heavily armed and protected? In any case, if he should happen to be coerced by a council, he can easily recant, even if he can't disown his words. In the final analysis, unless he's a blockhead, not a man, there are always a thousand loopholes through which he'll find it easy to wriggle.

Peter But tell me, by the power of the pope, who made all these excellent laws?

Julius Who else but the fountain-head of all law, the supreme pontiff? But of course it is also his privilege to repeal, interpret, stretch, or limit them whenever it seems to be to his advantage.

Peter Now what quarrel *did* you have with the French and their king, whom your predecessors honoured with the title 'Most Christian,' especially as you admit that it was only under their protection that you survived at all, gained a crown greater than the emperor's, and even acquired Bologna and the other cities and subdued the invincible Venetians? How did the memory of so many recent good turns come to be lost? How were so many treaties broken?

Julius It would take a long time to tell the whole story. But to cut it short, I was entirely consistent in that I simply began to put into effect the ideas that I had formulated a long time before; I brought into the

open the plans that circumstances had forced me to keep quiet. As a matter of fact (and this is straight from the horse's mouth), I never really like the French; no Italian really feels kindly towards barbarians, any more, for heaven's sake, than a wolf does towards lambs. Well, I'm not just an Italian, but a Genoese, and so I used their friendship for as long as I needed their help; in such a case it is legitimate to use the service of barbarians. In the meantime, I put up with a lot, I concealed a lot, I promised a lot; in fact, there was nothing I didn't do, nothing I didn't suffer. But as soon as the situation had more or less reached the point that I wanted, all that was needed was to reveal the true Julius and throw all the barbarian scum out of Italy.

Peter These barbarians, as you call them: are they some sort of wild animal?

Julius No, they're human beings.

Peter Yes, human, but not Christians?

Julius Oh, they're Christians too, but what's that got to do with it?

Peter So they're Christians, in fact, but live like peasants, without laws or letters?

Julius No, they're very good at that sort of thing, and what's more – and this is what really annoys me – very rich.

Peter Then what does it mean when you call them barbarians? What's that you're muttering?

Julius I'll answer for him. Although Italy, like a sort of universal dustbin, is peopled by a chaotic mixture of all the dregs of the most barbaric nations, the Italians have acquired, from ancient literature, the ridiculous habit of calling anyone born outside Italy a barbarian; for them, the word is more insulting than if you said parricide or desecrator.

Peter So it appears. But seeing that Christ died for all men and that he was no respecter of persons, and since you claimed to be Christ's vicar, why didn't you welcome all men with equal enthusiasm? Christ himself never discriminated between them.

Julius I'd be quite willing to welcome Indians, Africans, Ethiopians, Greeks, so long as they paid up and acknowledged our supremacy by sending in their taxes. But we were quite right to cut them off from us, the Greeks most recently of all, because the obstinate fellows were slow to recognize the authority of the Roman pontiff.

Peter So the see of Rome is the tithe barn of the whole world, so to speak?

Julius Is it too much to expect that, having scattered our spiritual seed to all men, we should reap a worldly harvest from all men?

Peter What spiritual seed do you mean? All I've heard so far has been the story of a leader of the world, not of the church; not merely worldly, either, but pagan, and even more wicked than the pagans. Your proudest boast is your power to break treaties, to spark off wars, to provoke the slaughter of human beings. This is Satan's power, not the pope's. The man who makes himself vicar of Christ must model himself on him as closely as possible. In him is supreme power, but allied with supreme goodness; supreme wisdom, yet of the simplest kind. In you I see an illusory power combined with supreme wickedness and supreme folly. If the prince of evil, the devil, wanted to choose a vicar, whom better to appoint than a man like you? Tell me, when have you acted like an apostle?

Julius What could be more apostolic than to enlarge the church of Christ?

Peter But if the church is the Christian people, bound together by the spirit of Christ, you seem to me to have ruined the church by provoking hideous wars throughout the world, so that you could be evil and pestilent with impunity.

Julius What we call the church is the holy temples, the priests, particularly the Roman curia, and above all myself, the head of the church.

Peter But Christ made us his servants and himself the head. Has a second head grown now? How did you enlarge the church, anyway?

Julius Ah, now you're coming to it: listen. The church, once poor and starving, is now enriched with every possible ornament.

Peter What ornaments? Warm faith?

Julius You're talking nonsense again.

Peter Sacred learning?

Julius You don't give up, do you?

Peter Contempt for the world?

Julius Allow me to explain. I'm talking about real ornaments, not mere words like those.

Peter What then?

Julius Royal palaces, the most handsome horses and mules, hordes of servants, well-trained troops, dainty courtiers ...

Genius ... delicious harlots, grovelling pimps ...

Julius ... gold, purple, taxes; in fact, such is the wealth and splendour of the Roman pontiff that, by comparison, any king would seem a poor and insignificant fellow; any man, however ambitious, would admit defeat; any man, however extravagant, would condemn his own frugality; and any rich man – a money-lender, even – would look with envy on our wealth. These, I tell you, are the ornaments that I have protected and increased.

Peter You still talk of nothing but the world.

Julius You must still be dreaming of that ancient church in which, with a few starving bishops, you yourself, a pontiff shivering with cold, were exposed to poverty, sweat, dangers, and a thousand other trials. But now time has changed everything for the better. Now the Roman pontiff is something very different; you were pontiff in name and title only. Ah, if only you could see today the holy temples built for a king's ransom, the thousands of clerics in every country, most of them with enormous incomes, the bishops rivalling the greatest kings with their armies and wealth, the clerics' magnificent palaces! If you could only see, in particular, life in Rome today: all the cardinals in purple, attended by whole regiments of retainers, the horses more than fit for a king, the mules decked in fine cloth, gold and jewels, some even shod with gold and silver! If you could catch a glimpse of the supreme pontiff, carried aloft in a golden chair on the shoulders of his men, while the people on all sides pay homage at a wave of his hand; if you could hear the thunder of the cannon, the blare of the cornets, the blasting of the horns, see the flashes of the guns, and hear the applause of the people, the cheers, the whole scene lit by gleaming torches, even the greatest princes barely permitted to kiss the blessed feet; if you could watch the selfsame Roman priest, on foot this time, placing the golden crown on the head of the Roman emperor, who is the king of all kings (if written laws mean anything; in fact, he receives merely the shadow of a great name); if, I say, you could see and hear all this, what would you say?

Peter That I was looking at a tyrant worse than any in the world, the enemy of Christ, the bane of the church.

Julius You'd change your tune if you'd witnessed even one of my triumphs, such as my entry into Bologna, my celebrations at Rome after the defeat of Venice, my return to Rome after fleeing Bologna, or

the most recent one after the totally unexpected rout of the French at Ravenna; if you'd seen the ponies, the horses, the columns of armed soldiers, the panoply of the generals, the displays of hand-picked boys, the torches gleaming on all sides, the sumptuous litters, the processions of bishops, the stately cardinals, the trophies, the spoils; if you'd heard the cheers of people and soldiers resounding to the sky, the sound of applause echoing all round, the music of trumpets, the thunder of cornets, and seen the flashes of cannon, the coins thrown to the people, and myself, the leader and prime mover of the whole pageant, carried on high like some god: then you'd call the Scipios, the Aemilii, and the Augusti miserable skinflints compared to me.²⁹

Peter Whoa! that's enough triumphs, General Braggart! I'd welcome those men, for all they were pagans, out of disgust for you, the most holy Father in Christ who celebrated triumphs after the slaughter of thousands of Christians for your sake, who caused the ruin of so many armies, who never won a single soul for Christ by word or by example. There's fatherly affection for you! O worthy vicar of the Christ who gave himself to save all men, while you have engineered the ruin of the whole world to save your own pestilent head!

Julius You're only saying that because you begrudge us our glory, realizing how insignificant your pontificate was compared to ours. **Peter** Shameless man, do you dare to compare your glory with mine, although the glory is not mine, but Christ's? First of all, if you will allow that Christ is the best and true prince of the church, remember that he gave me the keys of the kingdom in person, that he gave me his sheep to feed, he sealed my faith with his approval. Bribery, fraud, and preoccupation with the things of the world made you pope, if indeed a man like you may be called pope. I won countless thousands of souls for Christ; you led as many to destruction. I was the first to teach Christ to pagan Rome; you have been a teacher of paganism in Christian Rome. I healed the sick with just the shadow of my body, I freed men possessed by devils, I restored the dead to life, and brought abundant blessings to every place I visited. What had your triumphs in common with all this? With one word I was able to consign to Satan anyone I wished: Sapphira and her husband both felt the extent of my power.³⁰ But whatever power I had, I used for the benefit of all; you benefitted no one, and if you had any power (and even in some cases when you hadn't) you aimed at the general ruin of the world.

Julius I'm surprised you don't include in your list of glories poverty, vigils, sweat, trials, prison, chains, abuse, stripes, and finally the cross.

Peter You do well to remind me, for I may more justly be proud of those things than of miracles. Christ commanded us to rejoice and exult because of such things; because of such things he called us blessed. In the same way my former colleague Paul, when boasting of his exploits, does not speak of cities taken by storm, of armies put to the sword, of princes of the world called to arms, of tyrannical splendour, but of shipwrecks, chains, scourges, dangers, snares; this is the true triumph of the apostle, this is the glory of the captain of Christ. He boasts of those he got for Christ, of those he called back from ungodliness, not of how many thousands of ducats he amassed. And now, at last, we celebrate an eternal triumph with Christ and even the wicked follow us with praises; there will be no one who will not revile you, except your own sort and your flatterers.

Julius I've never heard such things.

Peter I can believe it: after all, when did you have time to peruse the Gospels or to read through Paul's letters or mine, absorbed as you were by so many embassies, treaties, plots, armies, and triumphs? The other arts require a mind free from sordid concerns, but the teaching of Christ demands a heart wholly purged of the influence of worldly anxieties. Our great master did not come down from heaven to earth to give to men some easy or common philosophy. It is not a carefree or tranquil profession to be a Christian. To shun all pleasures like poison, to trample riches as if they were dirt, to hold one's life as of no account: this is the profession of the Christian man. Because such things seem intolerable to those who are not guided by the spirit of Christ, they take refuge in empty words and vain ritual, and they invent a false body of Christ to go with the false head of Christ.

Julius But what useful thing is left me, if you deprive me of my coin, rob me of my kingdom, strip me of my profit, forbid me my pleasures, if, in short, you take away my life?

Peter So you consider that Christ himself was unsuccessful because, although he was the master of all men, he became the butt of all? He spent his whole life in poverty, sweat, fasting, hunger, and thirst, until finally he died the most humiliating of deaths.

Julius Well, he may find some to praise him, but none to imitate him; at least, not in this day and age.

Peter And yet, in the end, to praise him is itself to imitate him. However, Christ does not deprive his followers of possessions, but enriches them with possessions true and eternal instead of false; none the less, he will not enrich them unless they have first repudiated and purged themselves of all worldly possessions. As he was himself wholly divine, so he wanted his body, that is his church, to be as like him as possible, in other words entirely detached from the evil influences of the world. Otherwise, how could it be like him who sits in heaven, if it is still wallowing in earthly mire? But when the church has shaken free from all the material comforts of the world and, more to the point, all its passions, then at last Christ displays his treasure and, in place of the honeyed pleasures (in fact tinged with much bitterness) left behind, he bestows a taste of heavenly delights, excelling by far those that have been abandoned ...

Julius What delights do you mean?

Peter Do you think that the gift of prophecy, the gift of knowledge, the gift of miracles are commonplace treasures? Do you think that Christ himself is worth little, when any man who receives him possesses all things in him? And do you think that we live like paupers here? Thus, the more each man suffers on earth, the richer is his joy in Christ; the poorer he is on earth, the wealthier in Christ; the humbler on earth, the more exalted and honoured in Christ; the less he lives in the world, the more he lives in Christ. But Christ not only wished his whole body to be thoroughly pure, but particularly his servants, that is the bishops, and whoever is greater among them, to be nearer to Christ and still less burdened and fettered by worldly possessions. But now I see the opposite of this: the man who wishes to be thought the closest to Christ, and even his equal, is involved with all the most sordid things, money, power, armies, wars, treaties, not to mention vices. And yet, although you are the furthest from Christ, you use the name of Christ to bolster your pride; you act like an earthly tyrant in the name of him who despised the kingdoms of earth, and you claim the honour due to Christ although you are truly Christ's enemy. You give your blessing to others, but are yourself accused; you open heaven to others, but are yourself totally excluded from it. You consecrate, but are yourself execrated; you excommunicate, but have nothing in common with the saints yourself. What difference is there between you and the sultan of the Turks, except that you shelter behind the

name of Christ? You have the same mentality, the same disgusting way of life, and indeed you are the greater plague upon the world.

Julius But I wanted the church to be adorned with all good things. They say that Aristotle divided good things into three categories, those of fortune, those of the body, and those of the mind. I had no intention of changing his order; I began with those of fortune, and would perhaps have soon come to those of the mind, had I not been snatched from the earth by an untimely death.

Peter Untimely, indeed! you must be at least seventy. Still, why did you have to mix fire and water?

Julius Well, if we have no worldly possessions, the common people will take absolutely no notice of us, whereas now they both hate and fear us. What's more, the whole Christian commonwealth would collapse if it couldn't protect itself against the fury of its enemies.

Peter Not at all: if the common people of Christendom were to see in you the true gifts of Christ, such as holiness of life, sacred learning, fervent charity, prophecy, and miracles, they would recognize your greater detachment from worldly possessions and respect you the more for it. The Christian commonwealth would expand and flourish if the gentiles could admire in it purity of life and contempt for pleasures, wealth, power, and death. At the moment, not only is it confined within a tiny area, but if you examine it carefully, you will find many who are Christians in name only. Tell me: while you were supreme shepherd of the church, did you never reflect upon the way in which the church began, grew, and became established? Was it by wars, wealth, horses? Of course not: it was by suffering, the blood of martyrs (including mine), imprisonment, scourges. You claim that the church has grown, when its servants have to bear the burdens of temporal authority; you call it adorned, when it is sullied by the rewards and delights of the world; you call it well defended, when to further the petty interests of the clergy the entire world is embroiled in disastrous wars; you say that it is flourishing, when it is besotted with worldly pleasures; and that it is calm, because it enjoys its riches, or rather its vices, and no one protests. On these grounds you have imposed upon the princes, and under your tutelage they have learned to call their great robberies and mad battles 'the defence of Christ.'

Julius I never heard such things before.

Peter What did your preachers teach you?

Julius I never heard anything but pure praise from them; they roared out fine rhetorical eulogies of me; they declared that I was Jupiter shaking the world with my thunderbolts, that there was something truly divine about me, that I was the common saviour of the world, and a lot more in the same vein.

Peter No wonder there was no one to season you, since you were the salt that had lost its savour and a fool. The true role of the apostle is to preach Christ to others, in the purest possible way.

Julius You won't open up then?

Peter The last person I'd let in is a pestilent fellow like you. In any case, we're all excommunicated, according to you. But would you like some friendly advice? You have a band of energetic followers, an enormous fortune, and you yourself are a great architect; build some new paradise for yourself, but fortify it well to prevent the evil demons capturing it.

Julius Never! I shall be true to myself and wait a few months, increasing my army until I can throw you out by force, if you won't surrender. I've no doubt I shall soon be joined by several thousand more soldiers slaughtered in the wars.

Peter You pestilent fellow! Oh, unhappy church! Hey, Genius, come here; I'd rather talk to you than to that loathsome monster.

Genius What's up?

Peter Are the rest of the bishops like him?

Genius A good many are cast in the same mould, but he's the pacemaker.

Peter I suppose it was you who incited him to all these crimes?

Genius Nothing to do with me; in fact, he ran so far ahead that I had trouble keeping up, even with the aid of my wings.

Peter I'm really not surprised that so few men reach here, when scoundrels like him have seized the helm of the church. However, I may conclude even from all this, that there's some chance of curing the common people, if they will honour this sink of iniquity simply because he bears the title of pope.

Genius That's very true. But my master has been gesticulating at me for some time, and now he's waving his stick; so farewell.

Shipwreck / Naufragium

The following dialogue is one of the *Colloquies*, a book designed to teach schoolboys good Latin. It was first published in 1518 under the title *Familiarium colloquiorum formulae* and became an instant success. In later editions Erasmus added a great deal of new material, often containing elements of social criticism. Consequently the book became controversial, was investigated by the faculty of theology at Paris, and condemned for its 'Lutheran' tendencies.

The dialogue presented here was first published in 1523. Its criticism of superstitious veneration of saints pleased reform-minded readers but caused indignation in conservative clerical circles who considered it irreverent.

This extract will be published in *CWE* 39-40, translated and annotated by Craig R. Thompson.

ANTONY, ADOLPH

Antony Terrible tales you tell! That's what going to sea is like? God forbid any such notion should ever enter my head!

Adolph Oh, no, what I've related up to this point is mere sport compared with what you'll hear now.

Antony I've heard more than enough of disasters. When you're recalling them I shudder as if I myself were sharing the danger.

Adolph To me, on the contrary, troubles over and done with are enjoyable. - On that same night something happened which in large part robbed the skipper of his hope of safety.

Antony What, I beseech you?

Adolph The night was partially clear, and on the topmast, in the 'crow's-nest' (as I think they call it), stood one of the crew, looking out for land. Suddenly a fiery ball appeared beside him - a very bad sign to sailors when it's a single flame, lucky when it's double. Antiquity believed these were Castor and Pollux.

Antony What's their connection with sailors? One was a horseman, the other a boxer.

Adolph This is the poets' version. The skipper, who was by the helm,

spoke up: 'Mate' - that's what sailors call one another - 'see your company alongside there?' 'I see it,' the man replied, 'and I hope it's good luck!' Soon the fiery ball slid down the ropes and rolled straight up to the skipper.

Antony Wasn't he scared out of his wits?

Adolph Sailors get used to marvels. After stopping there a moment, it rolled the whole way round the ship, then dropped through the middle hatches and disappeared. Toward noon the storm began to rage more and more. - Ever seen the Alps?

Antony Yes, I've seen them.

Adolph Those mountains are warts compared with the waves of the sea. Whenever we were borne on the crest, we could have touched the moon with a finger; whenever we dipped, we seemed to plunge through the gaping earth straight down to hell.

Antony What fools they are who trust themselves to the sea!

Adolph Since the crew's struggle with the storm was hopeless, the skipper, pale as a ghost, at last came up to us.

Antony His pallor portends some great disaster.

Adolph 'Friends,' he says, 'I'm no longer master of my ship; the winds have won. The only thing left to do is to put our hope in God and each one prepare himself for the end.'

Antony Truly a Scythian speech.²

Adolph But first of all, he says, 'the ship must be unloaded; deadly necessity compels it. Better to save life at the cost of goods than for both to perish together.' The plain fact convinced them. A lot of luggage filled with costly wares was tossed overboard.

Antony This was sacrificing for sure.

Adolph On board was a certain Italian who had served as legate to the king of Scotland. He had a chest full of silver plate, rings, cloth, and silk robes.

Antony He didn't want to come to terms with the sea?

Adolph No, instead he wanted to go down with his beloved treasures or else be saved along with them. So he protested.

Antony What did the skipper do?

Adolph 'We're quite willing to let you perish alone with your goods,' he said, 'but it's not fair for all of us to be endangered because of your chest. Rather, we'll throw you and the chest together into the sea.'

Antony True sailor's talk!

Adolph So the Italian, too, threw his goods overboard, cursing away by heaven and hell because he had entrusted his life to so barbarous an element.

Antony I recognize the Italian accent.

Adolph Soon afterward the winds, unappeased by our offerings, broke the ropes and tore the sails to pieces.

Antony Catastrophe!

Adolph At that moment the skipper comes to us again.

Antony To make a speech?

Adolph 'Friends' - he begins by way of greeting - 'the hour warns each of us to commend himself to God and prepare for death.' Questioned by some familiar with seamanship as to how many hours he thought he could keep the ship afloat, he answered that he couldn't promise anything, but not more than three hours.

Antony This speech was even sterner than the first one.

Adolph After saying this, he orders all the shrouds to be slashed and the mast sawn off down to its socket and thrown into the sea, together with the spars.

Antony Why this?

Adolph With the sail ruined or torn, the mast was a useless burden. Our whole hope was in the tiller.

Antony What about the passengers meanwhile?

Adolph There you'd have seen what a wretched plight we were in: the sailors singing *Salve Regina*, praying to the Virgin Mother, calling her Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the World, Port of Salvation, flattering her with many other titles the Sacred Scriptures nowhere assign to her.

Antony What has she to do with the sea? She never went voyaging, I believe.

Adolph Formerly Venus was protectress of sailors, because she was believed to have been born of the sea. Since she gave up guarding them, the Virgin Mother has succeeded this mother who was not a virgin.

Antony You're joking.

Adolph Prostrating themselves on the deck, some worshipped the sea, pouring whatever oil they had on the waves, flattering it no differently from the way we do a wrathful sovereign.

Antony What did they say?

Adolph 'O most merciful sea, O most kind sea, O most splendid sea, O most lovely sea, have pity on us! Save us! Many songs of this kind they sang to the sea – which was deaf.

Antony Absurd superstition! What did the rest do?

Adolph Some did nothing but get sick. Many made vows. There was an Englishman who promised heaps of gold to the Virgin of Walsingham if he reached shore alive. Some promised many things to the wood of the Cross at such and such a place; others, again, to that in some other place. The same with respect to the Virgin Mary, who reigns in many places; and they think the vow worthless unless you specify the place.

Antony Ridiculous! As if saints don't dwell in heaven.

Adolph Some pledged themselves to become Carthusians. There was one who promised to journey to St James at Compostella barefoot, bareheaded, clad only in a coat of mail, begging his bread besides.

Antony Did nobody remember Christopher?

Adolph I couldn't help laughing as I listened to one chap, who in a loud voice (for fear he wouldn't be heard) promised a wax taper as big as himself to the Christopher in the tallest church in Paris – a mountain rather than a statue. While he was proclaiming this at the top of his lungs, insisting on it again and again, an acquaintance who chanced to be standing by nudged him with his elbow and cautioned: 'Be careful what you promise. Even if you sold all your goods at auction, you couldn't pay for it.' Then the other, lowering his voice – so Christopher wouldn't overhear him, of course – said, 'Shut up, you fool. Do you suppose I'm serious? If I once touch land, I won't give him a tallow candle.'

Antony Blockhead! Batavian, I suppose.³

Adolph No, a Zeelander.

Antony I'm surprised nobody thought of the apostle Paul, who was once on a voyage and when the ship broke leaped overboard and reached land. No stranger to misfortune, he knew how to help those in distress.

Adolph Paul wasn't mentioned.

Antony Did they pray all the while?

Adolph Strenuously. One chanted *Salve Regina*, another *Credo in Deum*. Some had certain queer beads, like charms, to ward off danger.

Antony How devout men are made by suffering! In prosperity the

thought of God or saint never enters their heads. What were you doing all this time? Making vows to any of the saints?

Adolph Not at all.

Antony Why?

Adolph Because I don't make deals with saints. For what else is that but a bargain according to the form 'I'll give this if you do that' or 'I'll do this if you'll do that'; 'I'll give a taper if I can swim to safety'; 'I'll go to Rome if you rescue me.'

Antony But you called on some saint for help?

Adolph Not even that.

Antony But why?

Adolph Because heaven's a large place. If I entrust my safety to some saint – St Peter, for example, who perhaps will be first to hear, since he stands at the gate – I may be dead before he meets God and pleads my cause.

Antony What did you do, then?

Adolph Went straight to the Father himself, reciting the Our Father. No saint hears sooner than he or more willingly grants what is asked. **Antony** But didn't your conscience accuse you when you did this? Weren't you afraid to entreat the Father, whom you had offended by so many sins?

Adolph To speak frankly, my conscience did deter me somewhat. But I soon recovered my spirits, thinking to myself, 'No father is so angry with his son that, if he sees him in danger in a stream or lake, he won't grasp him by the hair and pull him to shore.' Of all the passengers, none behaved more calmly than a certain woman who was sucking a baby.

Antony What did she do?

Adolph She was the only one who didn't scream, weep, or make promises; she simply prayed in silence, clasping her little boy. – While the ship was continually battered by the sea, the skipper girded it with ropes both fore and aft, for fear it might break to pieces.

Antony Miserable protection!

Adolph Meantime an old priest, a man of sixty named Adam, jumped up. Stripped to his underclothes, and with his shoes and leggings removed, he urged us all to prepare likewise for swimming. And standing so in the middle of the ship, he preached to us a sermon from Gerson⁴ on the five truths concerning the benefit of confession,

exhorting everyone to be ready both for life and for death. A Dominican was there, too. Those who wished confessed to these two.

Antony What did you do?

Adolph Seeing everything in an uproar, I confessed silently to God, condemning my unrighteousness before him and imploring his mercy.
Antony Where would you have gone had you died in that condition?
Adolph That I left to God the Judge, for I was unwilling to be judge of my own cause; nevertheless a strong hope possessed my mind the whole time. – While all this is going on, the captain returns to us in tears. ‘Get ready,’ says he, ‘because the ship will be useless to us in a quarter of an hour.’ It was already shattered in some places and drawing water. Soon afterward a sailor reports seeing a church tower in the distance and beseeches us to appeal to whichever saint took that church under his protection. Everyone falls to his knees and prays to the unknown saint.

Antony If you had invoked him by name, he might have heard.

Adolph We didn’t know his name. As much as he could, meanwhile, the skipper steered the ship in that direction. By now it was breaking up, taking in water everywhere, and clearly about to fall to pieces had it not been undergirded with ropes.

Antony A bad state of affairs!

Adolph We were carried far enough in for the inhabitants of the place to see our plight. Groups of them rushed to the shore, and taking off hats and coats and sticking them on poles urged us toward themselves and by lifting their arms to heaven indicated their pity for our lot.

Antony I’m waiting to hear what happened.

Adolph The whole ship was filled with water now, so that thereafter we would be no safer in ship than in sea.

Antony At that moment you had to fall back on your last hope, your sacred anchor.

Adolph A miserable one. The crew bailed out the lifeboat and lowered it into the sea. Everyone tried to hurl himself into it, the sailors protesting in the uproar that the lifeboat would not hold such a crowd but that everybody should grab what he could and swim. The situation did not allow leisurely plans. One person snatches an oar, another a boathook, another a tub, another a bucket, another a plank; and, each relying on his own resources, they commit themselves to the waves.

Antony What happened during this time to that poor woman, the only one who did not weep and wail?

Adolph She was the first of them all to reach shore.

Antony How could she do that?

Adolph We had put her on a warped plank and tied her in such a way that she couldn’t easily fall off. We gave her a small board to use as a paddle, wished her luck, and shoved her off into the waves, pushing with a pole to get her clear of the ship, where the danger lay. Holding her baby with her left hand, she paddled with the right.

Antony Brave woman!

Adolph Since nothing else remained, one man seized a wooden statue of the Virgin Mother, now rotten and mouse-eaten, and, putting his arms around it, began to swim.

Antony Did the lifeboat come through safely?

Adolph The first to go down. And thirty people had thrown themselves into it.

Antony What mishap caused that?

Adolph Before it could get away it was overturned by the lurching of the big ship.

Antony A cruel business! What then?

Adolph While looking out for others, I nearly perished myself.

Antony How so?

Adolph Because there was nothing left for me to swim on.

Antony Cork would have been useful there.

Adolph In that emergency I would rather have had plain cork tree than golden candlestick. Casting about, I finally thought of the stump of the mast. Since I couldn’t pry it loose by myself, I enlisted the help of another man. Supporting ourselves on this, we put to sea, I holding the right end and he the left. While we were tossing about in this way, that priest who preached on board threw himself in our midst – on our shoulders. Big fellow, too. ‘Who’s the third?’ we yell. ‘He’ll be the death of us all.’ He, on the other hand, says calmly, ‘Cheer up, there’s plenty of room. God will help us.’

Antony Why was he so late in starting to swim?

Adolph Oh, he was to be in the lifeboat along with the Dominican (for everybody conceded this much honour to him), but although they had confessed to each other on the ship, nevertheless some condition –

I don't know what – had been forgotten. There on the edge of the ship they confess anew, and each lays his hand on the other. While they're doing this, the lifeboat goes down. Adam told me this.

Antony What became of the Dominican?

Adolph According to Adam, after entreating the aid of the saints he threw off his clothes and began to swim.

Antony Which saints did he invoke?

Adolph Dominic, Thomas, Vincent, and I don't know which Peter, but first and foremost he placed his trust in Catherine of Siena.⁵

Antony Christ didn't come to mind?

Adolph This is what the priest told me.

Antony He'd have swum better if he hadn't thrown off his sacred cowl. With that put aside, how could Catherine of Siena recognize him? – But go on with what happened to you.

Adolph While we were still tossing beside the ship, which was rolling from side to side at the will of the waves, the broken rudder smashed the thigh of the man who was holding on to the left end of the stump. So he was torn away. The priest, saying a prayer *Requiem aeternam*⁶ for him, took his place, urging me to keep hold of my end with confidence and kick my feet vigorously. We were swallowing a lot of salt water all this while. Thus Neptune saw to it that we had not only a salty bath but even a salty drink, though the priest showed us a remedy for that.

Antony What, please?

Adolph Every time a wave came rushing upon us, he turned the back of his head to it and kept his mouth closed.

Antony That's a doughty old fellow you describe.

Adolph When we'd made some progress after swimming a while, the priest, who was very tall, said, 'Cheer up, I'm touching bottom.' I didn't dare hope for such great luck. 'We're too far from shore to hope for bottom.' 'Oh, no,' he replied, 'I feel land with my feet.' 'Maybe it's something from the chests that the sea has rolled this way.' 'No,' he said, 'I feel land plainly by the scraping of my toes.' After we had swum a while longer in this direction and he again touched bottom, 'Do what you think best,' he said, 'I'm giving up the whole mast to you and trusting myself to the bottom,' and thereupon, after waiting for the waves to subside, he went on foot as fast as he could. When the waves overtook him again, he resisted by clasping his knees with his hands and putting his head under water, as divers and ducks do; when the

waves receded, up he popped and moved on. When I saw he was successful at this, I imitated him. Standing on the coast were men – hardy fellows and used to the water – who by means of long poles, held out from one to the other, braced themselves against the force of the waves; so that the one farthest out held his pole to the swimmer. When this was grasped, all heaved toward shore and the swimmer was hauled safely to dry land. A number were rescued by this device.

Antony How many?

Adolph Seven, but two of these died of exhaustion when brought to a fire.

Antony How many were you in the ship?

Adolph Fifty-eight.

Antony O cruel sea! At least it might have been satisfied with a tenth, which is enough for priests. From so large a number how few returned!

Adolph We were treated with wonderful kindness by the people there, who looked after our needs with astonishing eagerness: lodging, fire, food, clothing, money for travel.

Antony What people were they?

Adolph Hollanders.

Antony No people could be more kindly, though they do have savage neighbours. I guess you won't visit Neptune very soon again after this.

Adolph No, not unless God takes my reason from me.

Antony And I for my part would rather hear such tales than experience the events at first hand.