

Pastor to the Pope: Martin Luther's Modeling of Proper Christian Service in *Epistola Lutheriana ad Leonem Decimum summum pontificem* (1520)

*Neil R. Leroux, Professor Emeritus
University of Minnesota, Morris*

In the forty-plus years since Birgit Stolt's detailed rhetorical analysis of Martin Luther's *Freiheitstraktat* (1520), a full account of the reformer's employment of the *ars dialectica* and *ars rhetorica* remains a desideratum.¹ Yet we can make modest progress toward fulfilling that need when we consider one of the delicate personal and rhetorical predicaments Luther faced. While it is well known that in a two-year period Luther turned from a loyal supporter-defender of Pope and papacy to believing the papacy embodied the Antichrist, what is far less known, at least in the English-speaking world, is an emerging picture of the "rhetorical spirit" of Luther's theology (Grün-Osterreich and Osterreich 25).

In September 1520 Luther was asked by his superiors in the Augustinian Order to write a conciliatory letter to Pope Leo X (1513-21), knowing that in June 1520 Leo had already issued the papal bull (*Exsurge, Domine*) threatening excommunication and

¹In both of her early monographs Stolt investigates how Luther uses rhetorical canons. Retracing much of the information Dockhorn had expounded, Grün-Osterreich and Osterreich explore Luther's own writings and recount many of his own comments about rhetoric and dialectic. Nembach argues that in his preaching Luther follows Quintilian. Junghans lays important groundwork on the humanist ties with Luther. By 1990 a seminar entitled "Rhetorik in Predigten und Schriften Luthers" had been held at an International Luther Congress. Of the four participants reported by Stolt and Grane (1990), only Alfsvåg has been published in English.

naming Luther a heretic.² While both the Augustinians and Luther knew he had no intention of recanting his position or denouncing his writings—both of which the bull demanded he do within sixty days of its reception—an agreement was reached (negotiated by a papal emissary) whereby the letter would be backdated to appear to have been written prior to the official publication of the bull; hence, Luther’s letter may not be seen as groveling, in search of leniency.

My goal in this paper is not to deal with Luther’s motivations connected with the papal bull, however. Instead, the purpose is to examine the letter itself, for in it we observe Luther’s rhetoric at work as he “struggles for the ‘right words’ to reach out to” another (Matheson 244). In the letter he distinguishes between his respect for the person

²The extended process of papal excommunication against Luther had begun when he received the papal summons to Rome on August 7, 1518; Leo X later remanded the case to the Augustinian Order. Following interrogation by Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg on October 18, Luther was released from religious obedience by his Vicar General, Johannes von Staupitz, escaping on an unsaddled horse. However, Luther still considered himself an Augustinian for another few years (see Posset 239). While Staupitz had resigned his position in the Augustinian Order, in the first week of September 1520 papal chamberlain Karl von Miltitz persuaded Staupitz and Wenceslaus Link (Staupitz’s successor) to try to get Luther to write the letter to Leo X (Posset 267); by October 11 Luther had already received the papal bull *Exsurge, Domine* (Brecht 404-405). On December 10, 1520, Luther burned the bull and a copy of canon law in public, which, of course, did not stop the proceedings against him. The entire papal excommunication process was not fully completed until the formal proclamation of the papal bull *Decet Romanum Pontificam* on January 3, 1521 (Brecht 242, 427). With the Edict of Worms, signed by Emperor Charles V on May 26, 1521, Luther had thus been excommunicated by both Pope and emperor. Posset (238-239) argues that Luther’s later claim to have been excommunicated three times, the first being by his own Augustinian Order, is exaggeration. Oberman (186) accepts Luther’s statement, which derives from a Table Talk conversation in 1532.

of Leo and his office, as opposed to the Roman Curia, which Luther vilified. Here is Luther's letter to Spalatin, his prince's secretary, confirming the arrangement:

Sir Charles Miltitz and I have met at Lichtenberg. We agreed—and as I understand from him, this has great possibilities—that I should publish a letter in German and in Latin, addressed to the Pope, as a preface to some brief writing. In this letter I am to relate my whole story and show that I never wanted to attack the Pope personally, and throw the whole blame on Eck. . . . As all this is true, I can easily do it, and I will offer, as humbly as I can, to keep silent, provided that others keep silent too, so that I may not seem to omit anything in my power to make peace. This is my desire, and, as you know, I have always been ready to do it. I shall prepare this, therefore, at the earliest possible moment. If it turns out the way we hope, it is well; if it turns out differently, it will also be well, because it is the will of the Lord.³

In his letter Luther will profess, and try to demonstrate, genuine respect—even affection—for Leo; in that same document he will furnish vehement and brutal indictments against the Roman Curia. Subsequently, Luther will find the papacy itself to have become thoroughly corrupted. Composing the letter to his Pope during this volatile,

³Luther to George Spalatin, Lichtenberg, October 12, 1520 (*LW* 48:180-181): “Salutem. Conuenimus Lichtenberge, Mi Spalatine, D. Carolus Miltitius & ego. Quantumque ex eo audio, magna spe statuimus, vt ego ad summum pontificem Epistolam edam vtraque lingua, praefixam paruulo alicui opusculo, in qua narrem historiam meam & quam non vnquam personam eius appetierim, totum pondus in Eccium versurus. Que omnia cum ita vere se habeant, facile facio & quam possum humillime offeram silentium, modo ceteri quoque sileant, vt nihil videar omittere, quod in me ad pacem quoquo modo facere posit, desyderandum, id quod semper facere paratus fui, quod non ignores, parabo itaque hec ante omnia propediem. Si eueniet, quod speramus, bene factum est. Si aliud erit, id quoque bonum erit, quia domino placitum erit” (*WABr* 2:197).

transitional period cannot have been easy and would require more than mere ornamentation of thought (Matheson 244).

The Epistle and the Treatise

Luther's open letter (*epistola*) to Leo X was not all that he sent; he also included as a gift a little treatise (*tractatulum*), "dedicated to you as a token of peace and good hope."⁴ This small book (*parva res*), as Luther says, "contains the whole of Christian life in a brief form."⁵ Indeed, *de libertate christiana* was also published in German (*Freiheitstraktat*) and headed by a brief letter of dedication to the mayor of Zwickau. In that letter to the mayor Luther says he has "dedicated this little tract and sermon to you in the German version, which in the Latin I dedicated to the Pope, so that it may indicate to everyone the cause (not unproven, I hope) for my teaching and writing on the papacy" (WA 7:20.19-22).⁶ Of these words, Berndt Hamm concludes that with the *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther is saying that

he has layed [sic] out before everyone, in complete openness, the cause, . . . one that, based as it is on arguments from Holy Scripture, can not be proven false. Thus Luther hopes that those who read in the *Freedom of a Christian* about how Christian freedom is grounded in the theology of justification understand why he rightly attacked the bases of a papal understanding of the church. ("Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*" 262-263)⁷

⁴ "sub tuo nomine editum velut auspicio pacis componendae et bonae spei" (WA 7:48.33).

⁵ "Vitae Christianae compendio congesta" (WA 7:48.36).

⁶ "Diß tractatell und Sermon euch wollen zuschreyben ym deutschen, wilchs ich latinisch dem Bapst hab zugeschrieben, damit fur yderman meyner lere und schreyben von dem Bapstum nit eyn vorweßlich, als ich hoff, ursach angetzeygt"; LW 31:333 reads "dedicated to the people in Latin."

⁷ Hamm had earlier published his article in German (see Works Cited). I cite the English version.

What is conventional about Hamm's remarks is that he identifies perhaps the principal theme that has helped *Freedom of a Christian* to be highly regarded today as one of the three foundational documents of 1520—indeed, of the early German reformation.⁸ However, our interest here is not so much in the *Freedom* treatise (in Latin) as the letter to Leo that accompanied it. For there we encounter Luther offering to Leo himself the reason for sending him the treatise.

Hamm argues convincingly that Luther wrote the open letter to Leo X and the *Freedom* treatise as a “compositional unity.” He shows how the “interpretation of the two texts is closely connected, that a proper understanding of the circular letter can be deduced only from the tract on freedom, and, conversely, that the circular letter discloses the intent of the tract on freedom.” Hamm points out that, being over half as long as the tract, “with its own literary, theological, and religious-political significance,” the letter to Leo is “virtually a separate short essay by Luther on his position with regard to the Pope and the papacy” (249-250).

⁸Between 1520 and 1540 a total of thirty-nine editions were printed of either the letter separately (three), the treatise separately (twenty-one), or both together (fifteen), including editions in Low German, English, Spanish, and Czech. Printing occurred in Wittenberg, Augsburg, Leipzig, Straßburg, Speyer, Basel, Zwickau, Nürnberg, Vienna, Antwerp, Zwolle, Zürich, London, and Litomysl; see Benzing and Claus (numbers 731-769). WA 7:39-42 employs and discusses nine separate editions in their critical text. Besides *LW*, English language texts of the *Freedom* treatise (German text) are available in Woolf (351-379), and Krey and Krey (69-90, notes on 266-268). Both of these English texts, of course, lack Luther's Letter to Leo X. A very recent scholarly analysis of the *Freedom* treatise is Rieger. Both Grislis (95-99) and Hendrix (95-120) discuss Luther's Letter to Leo X.

In a separate paper I have analyzed Luther's *Freedom* treatise, but then reading Hamm's article prompted me to rethink Luther's letter to Leo and to investigate precisely *how* the letter works. Consequently, I offer some brief arguments here with evidence from Luther's style in the letter, for renowned Catholic scholar Joseph Lortz's challenge still merits attention:

Luther's style of language is not only elegant—concrete, lively, engaging—but also it is essential to what he has to say. In fact [,] we shall never attain the desired scholarly *opinio communis* about Luther, unless we have many penetrating investigations into the formal structural elements of his thought and style that go beyond previous efforts. (12)

Berndt Hamm shows how Luther's 1520 letter to Leo is “theologically quite coherently constructed and formulated” (253). I argue that Luther's style helps create that coherence.

Before turning to the letter itself, we need a brief summary of the *Freedom* treatise's twin themes, not at all obvious from Luther's title *de libertate christiana*. So my own paraphrased title would be “On Christian Liberty *and* Christian Service,” for Luther argues *two* theses: Thesis I (The Inner Man, the human relationship to God), “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none”; Thesis II (The Outer Man, the relationship among human beings), “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor* 78). Luther concludes of his first thesis: “Let this suffice concerning the inner man, concerning his liberty, and concerning its source—justification by faith. Neither laws nor good works does he need; on the contrary, they bring injury to him, if it is in them that he presumes he is justified.”⁹ Luther's second

⁹“Haec dicta sint de interiore homine, de eius libertate et de principe iustitia fidei, quae nec legibus nec operibus bonis indiget, quin noxia ei sunt, si quis per ea praesumat iustificari” (WA 7:59.21-24). This statement was identified by Robert Kolb as one of Luther's remarks during 1516-1524 that may have

thesis: A Christian is a dutiful servant of all, subject to all. For, just as Christ emptied himself and served others, we offer ourselves *as Christ* to our neighbours. Our loving, joyful service to others *makes no distinctions as to whom it serves or what the outcome*.¹⁰

Luther says that:

in this way the strong member may serve the weaker . . . , each as one who cares for and works for, the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ [Gal. 6:1]. This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active through love [Gal. 5:6], . . . in work of the freest service with which a man willingly and without hope of reward serves another; and for himself he is abundantly satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith.¹¹

The two theses are not contradictories but rather correlatives (Leroux, "Luther's Middle Course"). Thus, Luther's *Freedom* treatise demonstrates that Christian liberty comes from our justification by faith in what Christ has done, and that this liberty spills over into service for others. This service is what Luther tries to carry out in his letter to Leo.

influenced Nikolaus Amsdorf with respect to the "detrimental nature of good works in regard to salvation"; cf. Kolb ("Good Works" 149, note 13). For another look at Luther's *de libertate christiana* (*Freiheitstraktat*), see Hütter.

¹⁰Therefore, his two propositions might better be described as God's liberation of those captivated by sin *from* their oppressors *for* the practice of the freedom to love the neighbour and care for God's world in daily life"; Kolb ("Forgiveness Liberates and Restores" 7), emphasis Kolb's.

¹¹"Nam et in hoc ipsum corporis curam habere Christianum est, quo per eius salutem et commoditatem laborare, res quaerere et servare possimus in subsidium eorum, qui indigent, ut sic membrum robustum serviat membro infirmo et simus filii dei, alter pro altero sollicitus et laboriosus, invicem onera portantes et sic legem Christi implentes. Ecce haec est vere Christiana vita, hic vere fides efficax est per dilectionem, hoc est, cum gaudio et dilectione prodit in opus servitutis liberrimae, qua alteri gratis et sponte servit, ipsa abunde satura fidei suae plenitudine et opulentia" (WA 7:64.29-37).

Style in Luther's Open Letter to Leo X

In what ways do Luther's letter and his *Freedom* treatise show compositional unity? Certainly not in *dispositio*, for a careful scrutiny of the structure of both documents shows that each follows a distinctly different plan.¹² Moreover, much of the *inventio* is at variance from one document to the other. However, one significant divergence is that the *Freedom* treatise's principal arguments derive from Scripture,

¹²The nature of the open letter (*epistola*) would suggest that some epistolary features of *dispositio* would still be apparent. One can discern the following structure in Luther's letter: *Salutatio* (LW 31:334; WA 7:42.4-5): Luther pays proper homage to his addressee, following protocol; *Exordium* (LW 31:334-335; WA 7:42.6—44.2): Luther conveys good wishes to Leo, acknowledging fully the difficult "relationship" between Luther and Leo—Luther's "war with Rome," which consists in a history of attacks on the Curia (provoked by others), all the while trying to maintain homage and reverence for Leo personally; *Narratio* (LW 31:335-341; WA 7:44.3—47.24): Here Luther attempts to explain how and why he can maintain good will for the man, despite his animosity for the Curia; why he has, in the last year, sustained such a vehement attack on the papacy. He argues that the Curia is a despicable bunch of flatterers who are damaging Leo and the Church. The biblical examples of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jesus's disciples suggest that Leo is not the first to face the situation of being surrounded by enemies. Luther characterizes the papacy as evil, and he appeals to Bernard of Clairvaux for the precedent and responsibility for calling this to Leo's attention. All of this section deals with past events and Luther's response to them; *Petitio* (LW 31:341-343; WA 7:47. 25—48.31). Luther pleads with Leo to intervene and stop the Curia from prosecuting him, from pressing him to recant, from further harassment. Luther states what he is and is not willing to do. Further, Luther instructs Leo to reconsider his position as Pope and its responsibilities to Christ and the Church. Again invoking Bernard, Luther argues that his boldness is not presumption but rather following "what brotherly love demands," the very principle he urges Leo himself to follow; *Conclusio* (LW 31:343; WA 7:48.32—49.4): Luther announces the gift that accompanies the letter—the "little treatise" on Christian freedom. This gift is all he has to offer, and it is all Leo needs, if he reads and understands it.

whereas very little biblical language—none of it exegetical in nature—finds its way into the letter.

Close reading of the letter reveals that Luther appears to address Leo in two principal styles; in this way we can observe how he executes the crucial distinction between respect for person-office and disdain for the corrupt Curia (named eight times) that surrounds the Pope. First, consider Luther’s sincere, deferential, humble style, which employs twenty instances of direct address (*apostrophe*). These epithets range from polite to reverential. Berndt Hamm demonstrates that the use of epithets in the *salutatio* of the German version is also present in the body of the Latin version.¹³ The most common epithet is a standard “Your Blessedness [*tuae beatitudinis*]” (six times). But Luther also employs the superlative: “Leo, most blessed father [*Leo pater beatissime*],” “most excellent Leo [*optime Leo*]” (three times), “most blessed father [*Beatissime pater*]” (twice), and even the more personal “my Leo [*mi Leo*],” “my father Leo [*mi Leo pater*]” (twice).¹⁴

¹³Hamm (“Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian*” 265, note 35) observes: “‘To the most holy father Leo the 10th, Pope in Rome, all blessedness in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. Most holy in God the Father. . . .’ In the Latin version, Luther uses the simple title ‘ad Leonem . . .’ and ‘Leoni’ In the German, Luther enhances the customary address ‘Holy Father,’ which he uses quite often in the Letter. This is not just a concession to the actual office and dignity of the Pope in the Roman Church, but, rather, in my opinion, this is a very seriously thought-out theological statement that the Pope, as a person, is called to greatest holiness, that is, to blessedness before God.”

¹⁴Luther not only uses superlatives in distinct formulary epithets; but also piles them up in series when speaking about Christ. In his 1519 lectures on the Psalms he states that Christ embraced “the highest joy and the deepest sorrow, the most abject weakness and greatest strength, the highest glory and lowest

These endearments, as I call them, are nestled among explanations of the writer's righteous innocence, his good will, and his gracious intentions—both past and present. Luther says he looks up to Leo and thinks of him occasionally. Luther wishes “with all [his] heart” that Leo and his see enjoy every blessing, “for which I have with earnest prayers to the best of my ability besought God” (*LW* 31:334; *WA* 7:42.7-16). Luther says he has zealously defended Leo's innocence against his defamer Prierias (1456-1523); he claims that Leo's reputation and blameless life are “too well known and too honourable” for anyone foolishly to attack such a one. Luther claims always to have tried to avoid attacking even the dishonorable, and he pledges to continue to do so. Taking no pleasure (*delector*) in anyone's faults (*crimine*), Luther avers that he is fully conscious of the “great beam in my own eye” (following Matt 7:4-5). With that premise, he then alludes to John 8:7 in concluding he could not “be first to cast a stone.” Luther says he has “never thought ill of you [Leo] personally” (*LW* 31:334-335; *WA* 7:43.10-36). Luther says he was “moved by this affection for you [Leo],” and then the affection and compliments slide toward pity: “I have always been sorry, most excellent Leo, that you were made Pope in these times, for you are worthy [*dignus*] of being Pope in better days [*melioribus*]. The Roman Curia does not deserve to have you or men like you” (*LW* 31:337; *WA* 7:44. 29-30). Luther says he tells the truth because he wishes Leo well, and we note both his use of inversion (*hyperbaton*) (which places the direct object into first position), and parallel ending phrases (*isocolon*) in each clause: *veritatem enim tibi dico*,

shame, the greatest peace and deepest tribulation, the most exalted life and most miserable death” (*WA* 5:602.21-26), quoted by Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor* 114.

quia bona tibi volo (LW 31:337; WA 7:45.3). Luther then calls him “my Father Leo” and makes his most frank and bold declaration yet of his intentions:

So far have I been from raving against your person that I even hoped I might gain your favor and save [*salute*] you if I should make a strong and stinging assault upon that prison, that veritable hell of yours. For you and your salvation and the salvation of many others with you will be served by everything that men of ability can do against the confusion of this wicked Curia. (LW 31:338)¹⁵

Finally, note Luther’s antithesis with its balanced clauses, constructing a *chiasmus*: “Your office [a] they serve [b] who do every harm [to the Curia] [c]; [they] who in every way curse it [c₁], glorify [b₁] Christ [a₁] [*Tuum officium faciunt, qui huic male faciunt: Christum glorificant*]” (LW 31:338; WA7:45.12-19). In short, Luther has tried to construct an ethos worthy of his claim, in the *petitio*, of coming “prostrate before you” (LW 31:341; WA 7:47.25), with an attitude, I believe, of what Spitz calls “obedient rebel and reluctant reformer” (203).¹⁶

A second major stylistic strategy in the letter is Luther’s invocation of righteous indignation, directed not toward Leo but rather against recent opponents (Eck, Prierias, Cajetan), previous villains (Popes Pius and Julius), the Curia, and even of the controversy against him—which he calls warfare (*bellum*). These enemies are “monsters of this age,” “raving crowds of flatterers,” “enemies of peace,” and “pestilential fellows.” Here we

¹⁵“Tantum enim abest, ut in tuam personam saevirem, ut sperarem etiam gratiam initurum me et pro tua salute staturum, si carcerem istum tuum, immo infernum tuum strenue et acriter pulsarem. Tibi enim tuaeque saluti profuerit et tecum multis aliis, quicquid in impiae huius Curie confusionem moliri potest omnium ingeniorum impetus” (WA 7:45.13-18).

¹⁶ Pelikan had used the term “obedient rebel” a decade earlier.

observe Luther's vitriol spilled out upon those that he cannot love or respect; enemies who have now surrounded Leo and his see.

The Papacy (*Curia Romana*) is “more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom ever was,” characterized by “completely depraved, hopeless, and notorious godlessness” (*LW* 31: 336; *WA* 7:44.3-6), and is a “most disordered Babylon” (*LW* 31:336; *WA* 7:44.9). Like a “flood covering the world,” Rome has poured forth “nothing but a devastation [*vastitas*] of men's possessions, bodies, souls—the worst examples of the worst of all things” (*LW* 31:336; *WA* 7:44.12-14). The Roman church, once the holiest of all, has become “the most licentious den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell.” Even the Antichrist could think of “nothing to add to its wickedness” (*LW* 31:336; *WA* 7:44.15-18). The Curia is already “lost” (*pervenit*) and Leo is at risk of being “poisoned” (*veneo*) (*LW* 31:336; *WA* 7:44.23). Luther calls Rome's evils a “gout” (*podagra*); he likens the Curia to “the Iscariots, the sons of perdition;” he considers them as “criminal and detestable” (*scleratio et execratio*), seeking to use “your [Leo's] name and authority” to destroy men's possessions and souls, “to increase crime, to suppress faith and truth among God's whole church. Luther cries out to a most unhappy Leo, one who sits on a most dangerous throne” (*LW* 31:337; *WA* 7:44.27—45.3).

Johannes Eck (1469-1534) is a notable enemy of Christ, “with an insatiable lust for glory”; he is a boastful braggart, “frothing and gnashing” (*spumans et frendens*) his teeth; he is puffed up with overconfidence, one who became overcome with “unbelievable madness” after the Leipzig Debate (1519), where he suddenly “turned his weapons against me and completely upset our arrangement for maintaining peace” (*LW*

31:338-339; WA 7:45.25-35—46.25). Cajetan (1469-1534) is an “unwise and unfortunate, indeed, an unreliable man”; he possessed a “churlish arbitrariness”; he “rashly and arrogantly” (*temere et superbe*) “disturbed order” (*LW* 31:339; *WA* 7:46.2-10). The controversy and confusion itself is now most disturbing and dangerous, even putting Leo himself in a “most miserable and dangerous position” (*LW* 31:340-341; *WA* 7:47.11—48.2).

In sum, in the first style the writer may come across to us as a penitent Luther, one trying to shift blame from himself by using the second style—a recalcitrant Luther. However, such an assessment elides our observations of Luther’s frequent arguments that, as Perelman would say, attempt to dissociate¹⁷ Leo and the papal see from the Curia that surrounds him: that is, corrupting advisers *versus* person-office.¹⁸ Moreover, in a rush to assign blame-shifting to Luther, we would thus be downplaying the sincerity with which he acknowledges—even takes pride in—his standing up to the Papacy (at Heidelberg [1518] and Augsburg [1518], at Leipzig [1519], as well as in many writings). As it happens, in his use of invective Luther here invokes Jesus, Paul, and Bernard as

¹⁷Another distinction Luther asserts (=dissociative argument) is that his attack against Rome is directed toward “ungodly doctrines” (*impias doctrinas*), “not because of their “bad morals” [*malos mores*], but because of their “ungodliness” [*impietatem*] (*LW* 31:335; *WA* 7:43.20-21); see Perelman 126-137 for “dissociation of ideas.”

¹⁸*Curia Romana*, “the complex of departments and institutes that assist the Pope in the exercise of his supreme pastoral function for the good and the service of the universal Church and of the particular Churches” (Stelten 323). However, Luther varies his terms, making them at times almost indistinguishable: *Sedes, Romanae Ecclesiae, Romana Curia, Curia, Romana sedes, sedis Apostolicae*, and just plain “Rome,” “Roman” (“Roman corruptions,” “Roman ignominy,” “Roman cause,” etc.).

exemplars. He mentions the very terms used by Jesus in his “fervent zeal” (“brood of vipers, blind fools, hypocrites, children of the devil”); by Paul (“son of the devil, full of deceit and villainy; dogs deceivers, adulterers”); and he claims company with the prophets. But for a concrete “argument by model,” as Perelman (110-113) would call it, Luther specifically—with two different arguments—invokes Bernard of Clairvaux (ca. 1091-1153). From Luther’s *narratio*: “If Bernard felt sorry for [Pope] Eugenius¹⁹ at a time when the Roman See, which although even then very corrupt, was ruled with better prospects for improvement, why should not we complain who for three hundred years have had such a great increase of corruption and wickedness?” (*LW* 31:337).²⁰ Luther’s appeal to Bernard goes on to argue that this corruption, while now under the wrath of God, can be answered: “Only one thing can we try to do (as I have said): a few from that yawning chasm of Rome we may be able to call back and protect [*revocare et server*]” (*WA* 7:45.11-12). Here Luther has employed the very verb, *revoco*, which he had three times refused to utter at Augsburg under Cajetan.²¹ Now he uses it, not to recant his teachings or writings, but to declare his desire to minister to brethren in Christ. Luther’s second appeal to Bernard comes in the *petitio*:

Perhaps I am presumptuous in trying to instruct [*docere*] so exalted a personage from whom we all should learn and from whom the thrones of judges receive their decisions,

¹⁹ Pope Eugenius III (1145-1153).

²⁰ “Si enim Bernhardus suo Eugenio compatitur, cum adhuc meliore spe Romana sedes, licet tum quoque corruptissima, imperaret, Quid nos non queramus, quibus in trecentis annis tantum accessit corruptionis et perditionis?” (*WA* 7:45.3-6).

²¹ After Augsburg Luther reflected upon the experience: “But I could not bring myself to say those six letters, REVOCO [‘I recant’]!” Quoted by Oberman (196).

as those pestilential fellows of yours boast. But I am following the example of St. Bernard in his book, *On Consideration*, to Pope Eugenius, a book every Pope should know from memory. I follow him [*emulor*], not because I am eager to instruct you, but out of pure and loyal concern which compels us to be interested in all the affairs of our neighbors, even when they are protected, and which does not permit us to take into consideration either their dignity or lack of dignity since it is only concerned with the dangers they face or the advantages they may gain. (*LW* 31:342)²²

Seen in the above quotation, we find yet a crucial, third style—one coming late, in the letter's *petitio*. This is the bold, pastoral teacher who puts it plainly to the Pope what Berndt Hamm finds so significant, programmatically, for the compositional unity of both letter and treatise. Luther instructs Leo about the false and harmful character, as well as the problematic authority, of the Papacy: rather than being arbiter of Scripture, it belongs under the jurisdiction of Scripture. Luther warns Leo not to heed the “sirens” who would delude him into forgetting he is a mere man and would convince him he is a “demigod” (*mixtum deum*), commanding and requiring whatever he wishes: “you will not have such remarkable power.” Luther calls Leo a *servus servorum*, not *dominum mundi*, alleging that those who “pretend” (*figunt*) or “prate: (*garriunt*) or “exalt” (*elevant*) or “boast” (*iactant*) or “ascribe” otherwise (*tribuunt*) are those who “deceive” (*decipiunt*) and “err”

²²“Impudens forte sum, tantum verticem visus docere, a quo doceri omnes oportet, et sicut iactant pestilentiae tuae, a quo iudicantium throni accipiunt sententiam: sed emulor sanctum Bernhardum in libello de Consyderatione ad Eugenium, omni pontifici memoriter noscendo. Neque enim docendi studio, sed purae fidelisque sollicitudinis officio hoc facio, quae cogit nos etiam omnia tuta vereri proximis nostris, nec patitur rationem dignitatis aut indignitatis haberi, solis periculis et commodis alienis intenta” (*WA* 7:48.19-25).

(*errant*), twice in first position, forming *anaphora*; these are those who are really “enemies” (*hostes*) (*LW* 31:341-342; *WA* 7:47.38—48.18).

In his argument that considers Leo as Vicar of Christ, Luther argues that Leo must believe those “who humble him” (*qui te humiliant*) and be different than his predecessors. He asserts that literally a man “is a vicar only when his superior is absent. If the Pope rules, while Christ is absent and does not dwell in his heart, what else is he but a Vicar of Christ? What is the church under such a vicar but a mass of people without Christ?” (*LW* 31:342).²³ Such a vicar is really an Antichrist or idol. The apostles better called themselves “servants of the present Christ” and not vicars of an absent Christ (*LW* 31:342; *WA* 7:48.13-18). Luther suggests that Leo is a brother who needs help, even the “slightest help of the least of your brothers.” Contrasting his offer of help with the previously excoriated term “flatterers” (*adulari*), Luther suggests that he is a “friend and most humble subject” and that, if Leo is still unconvinced, God is the one who “understands and judges” (*intelligat et iudicet*) (*LW* 31:343; *WA* 7:48.29-31). In this third style we find the obedient Luther.

The sincere, humble, deferential style thus does not issue from penitence but rather displays logical entailments of Thesis II of the *Freedom* treatise (“servant of all, subject to all”). Accordingly, the invective style of righteous indignation carries out features of Thesis I (“lord of all, subject to none”). The style of the bold, pastoral teacher fulfills necessities of both theses.

²³“Vicarius enim absentis principis est. Quod si pontifex absente Christo et non inhabitante in corde eius praesit, quid aliud quam Vicarius Christi est? At quid tum illa Ecclesia nisi multitudo sine Christo est” (*WA* 7:48.16-18).

Conclusion

Luther regards his own situation before Leo as one that compels him to “forget [his] exalted office and do what brotherly love demands” (*LW* 31:343; *WA* 7:48.28f.). I believe Luther thought the situation he himself faced was not as much prompted by terror brought on by the papal bull as much as the fierce responsibility he felt to his *Doktorat*.²⁴ He had changed the spelling of his family name from Luder to Luther, and had signed twenty-eight letters (1517-1519) as *Martinus Eleutherius* (Martin the Freed One).²⁵ Luther perceived, as established in the *Freedom* treatise, that—even more than his being under threat of excommunication—it was Leo who was in jeopardy and that an awareness of the Pope’s precarious state “obligated even the most humble Christian to ignore the high rank of the Pope and to be subject to him in humble readiness to help”

²⁴Luther more than once reflected on his doctoral oath. In his commentary on Psalm 82 (probably written in 1530) but still pondering the original oath, Luther asserted that his obligation was to expound the Scriptures to all the world: “I never wanted to do it and do not want to do it now. I was forced and driven into this position in the first place when I had to become a Doctor of Holy Scripture against my will. Then as a doctor in a general free university, I began, at the command of Pope and emperor, to do what such a doctor is sworn to do, expounding the Scriptures for all the world and teaching everybody” (*LW* 13:66); *WA* 31.1:212-213; cf. Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor* 18, 37, 71; Brecht 125-128.

²⁵Hamm (“Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian*” 263, note 17). On November 11, 1517, Luther signed his letter to Johannes Lang (ca.1487-1548), prior of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, “Fr [iar] Martinus Eleutherius, imo dulos et captivus nimis” (“Friar Martin, the freed one, indeed very much a slave and a captive”); *WABr* 1:73; *LW* 48:55. Could Luther already—three years in advance—have had in mind the basis for his dual theses that he developed in *de libertate christiana* (1520)? I thank Martin Brecht (202) for pointing out this particular signature.

(Brecht 265, note 34).²⁶ Accordingly, Luther extends his hand with all he can give; not only does he reach out to Leo via epistle, but he also offers a treatise, a spiritual gift, all that a poor man can afford (*LW* 31:343; *WA* 7:48.32—49.2). Regardless of what Pope Leo did with these gifts from this “one little friar” (*unum fraterculum*),²⁷ both letter and gift have borne a huge significance historically. In fact, we see this huge historical significance, in part, through what Lortz calls Luther’s “genius with language.”²⁸ That “genius” becomes somewhat more transparent to us, now that we have identified some of the ways Luther’s *elocutio*—seen, in part, through the figures of *apostrophe*, *hyperbaton*, *isocolon*, *chiasmus*, *anaphora*, *metaphor*, as well as through dissociation and invective—operates in service of *inventio*; style embodies Luther’s arguments. Whether Leo actually experienced any “communion between writer and reader,” at least he now had an additional viewpoint to consider (Matheson 244).

²⁶“Luther’s sense of responsibility coexists with daring defiance of responsibility. His crudity is an indicative factor, one that extends into his impulsive hatred for and rejection of the Papacy. Nevertheless, along with this trait, we find an all-embracing, pastoral drive which—as with St. Paul—impels him to share the sufferings of all”; Lortz (11).

²⁷Cardinal Cajetan’s characterization of Luther (*WABr* 1:235.88), ca. October 25, 1518, quoted by Oberman (16); cf. Brecht (261).

²⁸Lortz also calls attention to the “power of expression and the personal strength” (8), as well as Luther’s “high degree of superlativism” (12f.). Three recent works in English accounting for the reformer’s rhetorical skills are Alfsvåg (1987), Matheson (1998) and Leroux (2002).

Works Cited

- Alfsvåg, Knut. "Language and Reality: Luther's Relation to Classical Rhetoric in *Rationis Latomianae confutatio* (1521)." *Studia Theologica* 41 (1987): 85-126. Print.
- Benzing, Josef and Helmut Claus. *Lutherbibliographie: Verzeichnis der gedruckten Schriften Martin Luthers bis zu dessen Tod*. Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana 10. Baden-Baden: Heitz, 1965. Print.
- Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*. Trans. James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985. Print.
- D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. 67 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-1997. Abbreviated WA, by volume, page, and line number. Print.
- D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-1985. Abbreviated WABr, by volume, page, and line number. Print.
- Dockhorn, Klaus. "Luthers Glaubensbegriff und die Rhetorik: Zu Gerhard Ebelings Buch *Einführung in die theologische Sprachlehre*." *Linguistica biblica* 21/22 (1973): 19-39. Print.
- Grislis, Egil. "Martin Luther's The Freedom of a Christian Revisited." *Consensus* 24 (1998): 93-118. Print.
- Grün-Osterreich, Andrea and Peter L. Osterreich. "*Dialectica docet, rhetorica movet: Luthers Reformation der Rhetorik*." *Rhetorica Movet: Studies in Historical and Modern Rhetoric in Honour of Heinrich F. Plett*. Ed. Peter L. Osterreich and Thomas O. Sloane. Leiden: Brill, 1999. 25-41. Print.

- Hamm, Berndt. "Freiheit vom Papst—Seelsorge am Papst: Luthers Traktat 'Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen' und das Widmungsschreiben an Papst Leo X.: eine kompositorische Einheit." *Lutherjahrbuch* 74 (2007): 113-132. Print.
- . "Luther's *Freedom of a Christian and the Pope*." *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (2007): 249-267. Print.
- Hendrix, Scott H. *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981. Print.
- Hütter, Reinhard. "Martin Luther and Johannes Dietenberger on 'Good Works.'" *Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (1992): 127-152. Print.
- Junghans, Helmar. *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985. Print.
- Kolb, Robert. "Forgiveness Liberates and Restores: The Freedom of the Christian according to Martin Luther." *Word & World* 27.1 (2007): 5-13. Print.
- . "'Good Works are Detrimental to Salvation': Amsdorf's Use of Luther's Words in Controversy." *Renaissance & Reformation* 16 (1980): 136-151. Print.
- . *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*. Oxford: Oxford U, 2009. Print.
- Krey, Philip D. and D. S. Peter. Eds. *Luther's Spirituality*. New York: Paulist, 2007. Print.
- Leroux, Neil R. "Luther's Middle Course: Balancing Freedom and Service in *De Liberate Christiana* (1520)." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36.2 (October 2010): 29-39. Print.
- . *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2002. Print.

- Lortz, Joseph. "The Basic Elements of Luther's Intellectual Style." *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*. Ed. Jared Wicks. Chicago: Loyola, 1970. 3-33. Print.
- Luther's Works: American Edition*. Gen. Eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and H. T. Lehman. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986. Abbreviated *LW*, by volume and page. Print.
- Matheson, Peter. *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998. Print.
- Nembach, Ulrich. *Predigt des Evangeliums: Luther als Prediger, Pädagoge und Rhetor*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972. Print.
- Oberman, Heiko A. *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*. Trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart. New York: Doubleday, 1992. Print.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964. Print.
- Perelman, Chaim. *The Realm of Rhetoric*. Trans. William Kluback. Intro. Carroll C. Arnold. Notre Dame: U Notre Dame, 1982. Print.
- Posset, Franz. *The Front-Runner of the Catholic Reformation: The Life and Works of Johann von Staupitz*. St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003. Print.
- Rieger, Reinhold. *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen. De libertate christiana*. Kommentare zu Schriften Luthers 1. Tübingen: Mohr, 2007. Print.
- Spitz, Lewis W. "Psychohistory and History: The Case of Young Man Luther." *Soundings* 56 (1973): 182-209. Print.

Stelten, Leo F. *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.

Print.

Stolt, Birgit. “*Docere, delectare und movere bei Luther: Analysiert anhand der ‘Predigt, daß man Kinder zur Schulen halten solle.’*” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 44 (1970): 433-473. Print.

---. *Studien zu Luthers Freiheitstraktat, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das Verhältnis der lateinischen und der deutschen Fassung zu einander und die Stilmittel der Rhetorik*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholmer Germanistische Forschungen 6. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969. Print.

Stolt, Birgit and Leif Grane. “Rhetorik in Predigten und Schriften Luthers.”

Lutherjahrbuch 57 (1990): 257-259. Print.

Woolf, Bertram Lee. Ed. *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*. 2nd ed. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956. Print.