Pope Leo X

"God has given us the papacy. Let us enjoy it."

Some doubt that Giovanni de' Medici, who became Pope Leo X in 1513, ever wrote those words, though they are credited to him. Authentic or not, they are perfectly characteristic of the papacy of Leo. Leo was short, fat and flabby and adorned on his hands were sparkling rings on nearly every finger. Contrasting the blood and wars of Julius II, Leo, in typical Medici fashion, turned everything, even the most trivial ceremony, into a lavish affair, including fireworks, cavalries of white horses and golden tapestries to record the occasion. His ruling principle was simple: avoid trouble as far as he could and then accept the inevitable only when he had to. Everyone, it seemed, except Leo, knew dissent was brewing in some form as soon as he took the position of Pope. In 1515, Italian historian Francesco Guicciardini wrote, "Reverence for the Papacy has been lost in the heart's of men." Leo's reign as pope was called the "Golden Age" not because of the great things done but because of the amount of golden coins that flooded in and out of Rome from indulgences and commissions. For example, Pope Leo once had a 120-mile road specially built to take marble to a chapel Michelangelo was working on that would hold the tomb of Leo after his passing. He was also fond of Raphael, who replaced Pope Julius II's architect, Bramante. Raphael's most important duty was to oversee the construction St. Peter's in Rome, a "true house of God," according to Julius. (At this time, Michelangelo was working on the sculptures, like Moses, that would be part of Julius' tomb and be placed in the nave of St. Peters, under the dome). In order to finance this massive project, Pope Leo initiated a huge indulgence-selling campaign in and around a particularly rebellious region, Germany. He broadened the scope of the indulgence to include not only the forgiveness of sins for those on Earth, but also for those who have already passed. Many were convinced they needed to buy indulgences to ensure that relatives that passed before them were not living a life of eternal damnation. It is estimated that during his term as Pope, Leo spent six (6) times the money collected. When he passed his legacy had caught up with him. At his funeral, one observer noted that the only candle that could be found to light the inside of Leo's coffin was a stub of wax leftover from the funeral of a cardinal a week before.

Johann Tetzel

"When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."

Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar, was the Pope's master salesman. Tetzel traveled from village to village with a brass-bound chest, a bag of printed receipts and an enormous cross draped with the papal banner. His entrance into the town square, with the papal bull announcing the indulgence on a velvet cushion, was heralded with bells, candles, flags and relics. Staging his show in the nave of the local church, Tetzel would announce, "I have here the passports...to lead the human soul to the celestial joys of paradise. The Holy Father [the Pope] has the power in heaven and earth to forgive sin, and if he forgives it, God must do so also." The cost of the indulgence, Tetzel was quick to point out, was cheap when the alternatives were taken into account. Among the demons and
tempests in the medieval world, the indulgence, no matter the price, offered a glimpse of light in a world of darkness. In Germany, Tetzel exceeded his quota, as he always did. Indulgences were most popular among the peasants, yet it also hit them the hardest; they had the least money to spare. Tetzel's indulgence-selling campaign led Martin Luther to act on the frustrations that were consuming his thoughts. When Luther posted his "Ninety-Five Theses," the sales of indulgences dropped considerably. Tetzel, like Pope Leo, underestimated the power the monk from Wittenberg.

**Erasmus**

It would seem by his writings that Erasmus, one of the most well-known people in western Europe in the early part of the 16th century, would have welcomed the Reformation. Consider the views expressed in his most famous work, "The Praise of Folly." He ridiculed popes, bishops and cardinals, claiming they are "highly in love with themselves." He called monastic orders "brainsick fools" who have very little religion in them. He says of Popes, "their only weapons ought to be those of the Spirit." Later, Erasmus wrote a satire that described the failure of Julius II to get into heaven. Summarizing his feelings, he wrote in a private letter that, "The monarchy of Rome, as it is now, is a pestilence to Christendom." As a consequence, any teacher using the writings of Erasmus in the classroom was subject to execution on the spot, by order of the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian. But just as Michelangelo and other artists were dependent on the Church for support (money for housing, food, etc.), so was Erasmus. It would seem Erasmus was biting the hand that fed him. But he took it on the condition that he would remain an intellectual independent. Erasmus invested heavily in the power of logic. He believed every problem should be studied, researched, debated and discussed. Despite his "fame" (if such a thing could exist in the 1500s), He was not someone who wished the attention of anyone else. Yet when Luther sent waves across Europe with his Ninety-Five Theses, many critics charged Erasmus with inciting such "heresy." Erasmus wrote to Luther, "I have testified to them [the critics] that you are entirely unknown to me, that I have not read your books, and neither approve or disapprove of your writings, but that they [the critics] should read them before the speak so loudly...It was no use; they are as mad as ever...I am myself the chief object of animosity." Luther scorned Erasmus in his reply, writing Erasmus is a dreamer who "thinks that all can be accomplished with civility and benevolence."

**Frederick the Wise**

Although of the nobility, Frederick 'the Wise' of Saxony, an elector of the Holy Roman Emperor, was not unlike others that lived and worked in that region of Germany. He resented the huge amounts of money that was "taken" from Germany (in the form of donations and indulgence receipts) and sent to Rome. Frederick himself was a compulsive collector of relics from the Holy Land. Included in his collection of nearly 20,000 relics were the (supposed) threads of Mary and Joseph's clothing, bits of the Holy cradle and the remains of infants slaughtered by ancient kings. When Pope Leo X decided to announce another indulgence-selling campaign to finance the completion of St. Peters, he wanted to concentrate the new sales campaign on a region that was giving
him trouble, Germany. Frederick drew the line. He barred Johann Tetzel, the Pope’s master salesman, from selling the new indulgences in Saxony. Frederick was rumored to have supported the reforms proposed by Luther, but he never did so on record. He did, however, ensure that Luther was tried in Germany (at Worms) and not in Rome, where the favored punishment of burning at the stake was a much more likely outcome.

Pitchfork John

Selling the idea of "faith alone" was a difficult task, especially if the customer was a peasant who's world was composed of a smorgasbord of Christian virtue and medieval menaces. To the German peasant (or any peasant for that matter) death lurked behind every corner, just as the woodcuts of Albrecht Durer had so passionately illustrated. Pitchfork John would have had a difficult time understanding the theology behind Luther's teachings, but there is one thing he would have embraced: the disgust for the Pope. The simple fact of money leaving Germany for a church in Rome outraged many people. What it was spent on once it got there didn't help either. And the deviant behavior of many men and women of the church was well known. Since the existence of peasants was so delicate, their livelihood dependent on nearly everything outside their control, the emotions of people like Pitchfork John ran high.

Martin Luther

"I despise the pope, the Church and the councils, and I worship only Christ."
The son of devoutly Catholic and extremely strict parents, young Luther was a product of Christian mythology. During his childhood Luther believed the winds and water were inhabited by elves, gnomes, fairies, mermaids, spirits and witches. Luther was taught by his mother that these 'people' played minor pranks like stealing eggs, milk and butter. School taught him to fear God and revere the Church. But in 1505, Luther's devotion will take on new meaning. On the outskirts of a Saxon village, Luther was knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightning that nearly struck him. He cried in terror, "St. Anne (the patroness of miners) help me! I will become a monk!" Although he would later become famous for denouncing those he asked that night to help him, Luther did follow through with his promise.

For nearly a decade, Luther read, researched and lectured on the Scriptures. Near the end of that time, Luther came up with his views concerning the power of faith. This new revelation occurred not in a field during a dramatic storm but in a castle tower while performing "the most mundane of daily tasks." Faith alone, Luther concluded, was what guaranteed salvation, not simply "good works of Earth" and certainly not indulgences sold by Johann Tetzel. What Luther found in scripture, specifically the book of Psalm, contradicted what he saw happening to the Church. Luther wrote, "Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems a ...number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church?" Luther set forth his arguments in his "Ninety-Five Theses" and other writings that followed. After a series of pamphlets in response to a Papal Bull calling for
Luther to recant, Pope Leo admitted there was 'a wild boar has invaded the Lord's vineyard.' Luther burned the Papal Bull excommunicating him. Calls for charges of heresy echoed louder throughout the church hierarchy.

**Cardinal Cajetan**

Cardinal Cajetan demanded that Luther recant and Luther demanded to be shown on the basis of Scripture the error of his teaching.

**Philip Melanchthon**

In the beginning of 1521, he defended Luther by proving that Luther rejected only papal and ecclesiastical practices which were at variance with Scripture, but not true philosophy and true Christianity.

**Charles V**

In 1521, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, demanded that Luther appear before the diet of the Holy Roman Empire at Worms. Luther was asked to explain his views and Charles ordered him to recant. Luther refused and he was placed under an imperial ban as an outlaw. He managed to escape, however, and he was hidden away in a castle in Wartburg where he continued to develop his new church.

**Johann Eck**

He was a German theologian and was originally friends with Martin Luther. After the publication of the *95 Theses*, however, they parted ways. Eck became one of Luther’s main opponents as he (Eck) continued to support the Catholic Church. He also assisted the Pope in writing the Papal Bull condemning Luther’s Theses and he continued to speak out on behalf of and in support of the Catholic Church. In addition, he participated in several debates with other Protestant reformers.

**Thomas More**

He was an English lawyer, statesman, and philosopher who opposed Henry VIII’s attempt to separate from the Roman Catholic Church in order to create the Church of England.

**Ulrich Zwingli**

He was instrumental in leading the Swiss Reformation and promoted many of the same ideas as Martin Luther.

**John Calvin**

He was a French theologian and reformer who led the Protestant movement in Geneva,
Switzerland, where he used Protestant principles to establish a religious government 
based on the ideas of Calvinism.

**John Wycliffe**

He was a 14th century English theologian and rector who, spoke out against the Roman 
Catholic Church and who, more than a century before Martin Luther, promoted the idea 
that faith is what will get one to heaven as well as the idea that the Scripture should be 
available to everyone.

**Ignatius Loyola**

He was a Spanish soldier, theologian, and priest who founded the Society of Jesus in 
1541 and defended and promoted the Roman Catholic Church.

**Albert of Brandenburg (Archbishop of Mainz)**

He was a German clergyman who was actually fairly liberal and might have been open to 
Protestant ideas had the Peasant’s Revolt not occurred. After that, he was a firm 
supporter of the Roman Catholic Church.