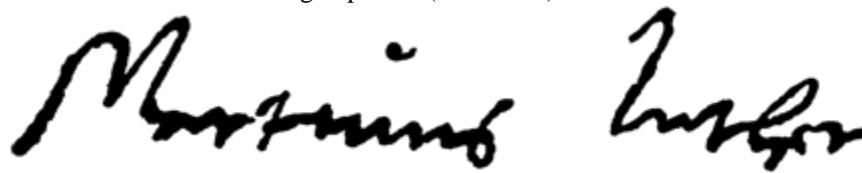


The documents below are excerpts from Martin Luther's personal letters written between December 29, 1520 and April 28, 1521. These letters were written before his appearance at the Diet of Worms regarding his excommunication and publications, his appearance at the Diet of Worms where he refused to recant his statements and publications, and the events up to the date of his kidnapping by friends who took him to the Wartburg Castle.

The purpose of this edition is to encourage discussion and research by students in World and European History and other interested groups and individuals. The statements following the "Reflection" are the perspective of Hank Bitten, history educator. The pictures and images are not part of Luther's letters and included for the purpose of education and context.

The complete documents are published in *Luther's Works*, Volume 48 Letters 1, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1963. Library of Congress No. 55-9893. Edited by Gottfried C. Krodel

***The Personal Letters of Martin Luther***  
***The Diet of Worms Papers***  
Letter to George Spalatin (Part 1 of 2)

A large, stylized handwritten signature of Martin Luther in black ink, written in a cursive script.

December 29, 1520

To the learned and devout man, Mr. George Spalatin, Saxon court chaplain, my friend in the Lord

“Greetings. Today I received copies of the letters from Allstedt as well as your letter from Kindelbruck. In it you ask me what I would do if called by Emperor Charles and if I could do anything without endangering the gospel and the public welfare, since you see that my enemies do everything to bring this affair to a head.

Of course I would by all means come, if called, in so far as it would be up to me, even if I could not come by my own power and instead would have to be driven there as a sick man. For it would not be right to doubt that I am called by the Lord if the Emperor summons. Further, if they should employ force in this matter, which is most probable, then this matter can only be commended to the Lord. If he does not want to preserve me, then my head is of slight importance compared with Christ, who was put to death in greatest ignominy – a stumbling block to all, the ruin of many.”

**Reflection:** *We see here Luther's concern about his enemies and fear for his life. George Spalatin is one of Luther's closest friends and he is traveling to Worms with the distinguished Elector Frederick of Luther's province of Saxony. It is winter and a few days after Christmas and they have stayed the night at Erfurt and sent a letter to Luther asking if he would come to the Diet, an assembly of government officials, to defend his teachings. Although Luther explains in this letter that he is ill, he makes it very clear that he will attend the meeting if he is summoned (invited) by Emperor Charles V.*



Martin Luther praying and preparing himself for his appearance at the Diet of Worms. Original illustration by Gustav Konig, in "Martin Luther" by Gustav Freytag, published by The Open Court Publishing Company, 1897 .

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**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
*The Diet of Worms Papers*  
Letter to George Spalatin (Part 2 of 2)



December 29, 1520

“Of course it has come about that the kings and rulers of the earth would gather and rage against the nations and peoples against God and his Christ. (reference to Psalm 2:1,2). Yet the Spirit teaches in the same Psalm that those who trust in God will be blessed; and not only this, but also that the Lord will laugh and deride those who don't. (reference to Psalm 2:10,11). Certainly it is not up to us to decide whether my life, or for that matter my death, will bring greater or lesser danger for the gospel and the public welfare.

The only concern remaining to us is to pray to the Lord that Charles's reign would not stain its first actions with my blood or anyone else's – to protect ungodliness. (Charles V was crowned two months ago in October) I would rather perish by the hands of the Romanists alone, than that he and his administration should be involved in this affair. You know what misery followed Emperor Sigismund after the death of Huss. After that nothing prospered for him anymore.

Now you have my judgment and opinion on this matter. You may expect everything of me except flight and recanting. I do not want to escape, much less recant; may the Lord Jesus strengthen me in this. I could do neither without endangering piety and the salvation of many.

Farewell and be strong in the Lord.”

**Reflection:** *Luther is concerned that he has lost control of the situation he has created with his arguments against indulgences and the pope. Perhaps I should write that he has lost control of the evidence he has presented on the grace and love of God for ordinary people as his support increases with the people. Luther is interpreting the public event of December 10, when he burned the letter from the pope while others were burning his books, as having political consequences for the newly crowned Holy Roman Emperor. In less than a week (January 3), Luther will receive the official document of his excommunication from Pope Leo X and summons to the Diet of Worm will follow at the end of January.*

*As we analyze this letter further, we understand Luther's perspective that God controls history. He uses the death of John Huss as an example of how God punished Emperor Sigismund with no heir, economic hardship, and battles with the Bohemians and Turks. Luther speaks of the power of prayer for the protection of his emperor and the people in his empire from a predictable crisis as a result of his message or death as a martyr.*

Psalm 2:1,2: ***"Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord."***

Psalm 2: 10,11: ***"Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."***



Luther Burning the Pope's Decree of His Excommunication

**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
*The Diet of Worms Papers*  
Letter to John Von Staupitz (Part 1 of 2)

A large, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Luther". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Martin" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Luther".

January 14, 1521

“Greetings. When we were at Augsburg (October 1518) and discussed my case, Most Reverend Father, you said to me among other things, ‘Remember friar, you began this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ I have accepted this word not as coming from you but as spoken to me through you, and I have kept it firmly in mind ever since.

Therefore I now challenge you with your own statement: remember that you said this to me. Up to now one has only played around in this case; now something serious is at hand. As you have said, unless God executes it, it cannot be executed at all. All these things are now completely in the hand of Almighty God. No one can deny this, Who can advise here? What can man plan? There is such a tremendous turmoil that I think it cannot be quieted except by the arrival of the Last Day, so great is the animosity on both sides.”

**Reflection:** *We have a clear statement about how difficult it is to reform the Church. Luther predicts unprecedented fighting as a result of his new and revolutionary teaching of the Gospel! Perhaps, we should keep Luther’s words front and center in our mind should Islam or another major religion experience a reform in our lifetime.*

*Luther clearly sees these events in the context of God’s plan, no longer for him but now for the world. He is writing to his teacher in the monastery, Father von Staupitz who was transferred to Salzburg, Austria in the summer. The Archbishop of Salzburg has ordered him to make a statement (notarized and before witnesses) that Martin Luther is a heretic. This statement is made in the context that Luther has been formally excommunicated by Pope Leo X. Luther is aware of this pressure on his mentor and friend and anxious about his future in the coming months.*

*Although Father von Staupitz paid a price for not signing the letter against Luther, he remained loyal to the Roman Catholic faith throughout his life.*



St. Peter's Abbey is the building with the dome and dates back to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.  
It has the oldest library of books in Austria.  
John von Staupitz was the supervisor of this monastery after he left Erfurt.

**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
**The Diet of Worms Papers**  
Letter to John von Staupitz (Part 2 of 2)

A large, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Luther". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Martin" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Luther".

January 14, 1521

"The papacy is not now what it was yesterday and the day before. Even if it excommunicates me and burns my books, and even kills me, doubtless something portentous is at the door. How happy the Pope would have been if he had begun this affair with good mediators for establishing peace rather than with force and storms for the destruction of Luther. I have burned the books of the Pope and the bull, at first with trembling and praying; but now I am more pleased with this than any other action of my life, for these books are worse than I had thought.

Emser is writing against me in German from Leipzig. Our Vicar Wenceslas has gone to Nurnberg. One says he has left the Order. May God keep him. Hutten has written a commentary upon the bull with the sharpest remarks against the pope; he is planning other steps in regard to this affair.

They have burned me three times in effigy at Louvain, at Cologne, and even at Mainz. Thomas Murner has also written furiously against me, I will wait to see about that barefooted ass of Leipzig.

Farewell, my Father, pray for the Word of God and for me. I am carried away and tossed about by the waves."

**Reflection:** *We see in this letter the effect of decisions that have polarized the clergy, ordinary people in some German cities, and conservatives who are loyal to the Roman Catholic/Christian Church. The world wide web (printing press) is full of political satire (woodcuts), theological arguments on the pope, free will, and making satisfaction for one's sins.*

*Attacking Luther is the satirical writer, Thomas Murner, who published a popular book titled, "On the Great Lutheran Fool" and Jerome Emser who defended Roman Catholic teachings. Both men blamed Luther for inciting violence by university students and his immoral action of burning the document of his excommunication and church books.*

*Defending the spirit of the Reformation are Ulrich von Hutten who witnessed the abuses of the clergy in Rome and Vicar Wenceslas Linck who converted the people in Nurnberg to the gospel message of God's grace.*

Von dem groffen  
Lutherischen Narren wie in  
doctor Murner beschworen hat ꝛc.



Murners Werke IX.

Thomas Murner writing his attacks on Luther and one of his satirical woodcuts.



**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
**The Diet of Worms Papers**  
Letter to Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony



January 25, 1521

“Most Serene, Noble Sovereign, Most Gracious Lord, Before all else my poor prayers and my humble services are always obediently at Your Electoral Grace’s disposal.

For in humble obedience, I am prepared to come to the pending Diet of Worms if I receive sufficient guarantees and a safe-conduct for the journey there and back. I am willing to appear before said devout, learned, and neutral judges. With the help of the Almighty I am ready to present myself and give account so that each one may truly learn that I have until now done or said nothing out of a blasphemous, rash, or inordinate desire, or for temporal and worldly glory and profit. All that I have written or taught was for the sake of my conscience and my oath and obligation as a humble teacher of Holy Scripture, to the praise of God, for the welfare and salvation of all Christendom, and for the good of the whole German nation. I have worked for the eradication of dangerous abuses and superstitions and the liberation of holy Christendom in its entirety from so many endless, innumerable, un-Christian, and damnable tyrannical diminutions of the gospel, burdens and blasphemies.”

**Reflection:** *This petition to a high government official does not appear to be humble or one offering compromise. Luther clearly states that his conscience is clear and that his evidence of Holy Scripture is absolute and definitive. He clearly defines his mission before the Diet of Worms to expose the abuses of the Church, the superstitions of relics and letters of indulgences, and the tyranny of canon laws.*

*Luther has not been invited to the Diet of Worms yet; but it is obvious that if Luther speaks this will be a controversial presentation on the national stage. The Reformation has moved from a theological discussion to a political crisis in Europe.*



The distance from Wittenberg to Worms (a two week journey)

**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
*The Diet of Worms Papers*  
Letter to George Spalatin

A large, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Luther". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a prominent 'M' and 'L'.

April 14, 1521

"Greetings. I am coming, my Spalatin, although Satan has done everything to hinder me with more than one disease. All the way from Eisenach to here I have been sick; I am still sick in a way which previously has been unknown to me. Of course I realize that the mandate of Charles has also been published to frighten me. But Christ lives, and we shall enter Worms in spite of all the gates of hell and the powers of the air. I enclose copies of the Emperor's letters. It is not wise to write further letters until I first see in person what has been done, so that we may not encourage Satan, whom I have made up my mind to frighten and despise. So, prepare the lodging."

Farewell,  
Frankfurt

**Reflection:** *Luther is on his way to Worms and the distance from Frankfurt is about 50 miles or a journey of two days. He has been very ill with a fever because we know that the doctors have taken blood from him to lower his fever. Luther is also a popular celebrity and the ordinary people greeted him on the road during the two weeks of travel.*

*The publication of Emperor Charles V to all towns was a hostile effort to confiscate and burn all of Luther's writings, even though he gave Martin Luther a protection of safe conduct.*

*There were attempts by supporters to get Luther to compromise before his appearance before the Diet of Worms but Luther refused to be distracted. He appeared before the Emperor and assembled electors for questioning at 4:00 p.m. on April 17.*

**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
*The Diet of Worms Papers*  
Letter to Emperor Charles V (Part 1 of 5)



April 28, 1521

“To the Most Serene and Invincible Lord Charles V, chosen emperor of the Romans, Caesar Augustus, king of the Spaniards, of both Sicily and Jerusalem, archduke of Austria, duke of Burgundy, my most clement Lord

**Jesus**

Grace and peace with all my submission in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Most Serene and invincible Emperor, most clement Lord: Your Sacred Majesty had summoned me to Worms with a public guarantee of safe-conduct in order to investigate my opinion concerning the little books that were published under my name. Complying with this summons, I appeared in all humility before Your Sacred Majesty and the whole Imperial diet, thus being obedient in every way. Your Sacred Majesty ordered that I be asked first whether I would acknowledge said little books as mine and second whether or not I would be ready to evoke them, or would uphold them.

When I had acknowledged that these little books were mine, I pointed out with great reverence and submission that the following was my opinion: since I had fortified my little books with clear and intelligible Scripture passages, it does not seem right or just to deny the Word of God and revoke my little books in this way, nor could I do it in any way. I humbly begged that Your Sacred Majesty under no circumstances allowed to be forced into such a recanting."

**Reflection:** *Martin Luther is writing this from a city 16 miles north of Frankfurt called Freidberg. He knows that he is public enemy #1 and that he will never preach again. His letter raises questions if his intention is to appeal the decision of the Emperor or present an accurate record of what happened at Worms.*

*Luther was not expecting the opening question presented to him at the Diet of Worms. The question was “Do you recant what you have written in your books?” Since Luther’s writings included substantial documentation from the Holy Bible, he could not recant what he wrote without rejecting God’s Word. Luther was expecting to argue his position on the grace of God as stated in the Bible and his books and not expecting a succinct question requiring a “yes” or “no” answer, with the penalty of death. Faced with eternal damnation if he rejected God’s Word or death as a heretic by fire, Luther chose an earthly death by refusing to apologize for what he wrote.*

*Since Luther wrote two identical copies of this letter, one to Emperor Charles V and the other to the printers, my interpretation is that he wants to set the record straight before he is found and executed. In this context, Luther is a master of social media with what we might consider a tweet, Facebook post, or editorial in a major newspaper.*

*The Diet of Worms is a political, historical, and religious turning point in world history! Luther’s letter of April 28 has extraordinary significance.*

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

17 that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped

**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
**The Diet of Worms Papers**  
Letter to Emperor Charles V (Part 2 of 5)

A large, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Luther". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Martin" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Luther".

April 28, 1521

“The possibility was finally discussed that I should make a concession, and entrust some articles selected from my books to the judgment of an Ecumenical Council.

I, however, who was always humbly and zealously ready to do and suffer everything possible for me, could not obtain the fulfillment of this one obviously completely Christian wish: that the Word of God should remain free and unbound for me; that presupposing this, I should submit my little books to Your Sacred Majesty and the Estates of the Empire or even entrust them to the judgment of a council; and that nothing against God’s gospel should be submitted by me or decreed by them. This was the crux of the whole controversy.

Since the Word of God is above everything, it has to be held absolutely free and unbound in all things, as Paul teaches. The Word of God is never subject to any man’s whim to lower its importance or challenge it, no matter how great, how numerous, how learned, and how holy the men are. ‘If we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you let him be accursed.’” (Galatians 1:8)

**Reflection:** *As we read this excerpt we see how upset Luther is with the back door diplomacy that was proposed by his friends to save him from execution. The offer of submitting some of his writings to an independent Council infuriated Luther. He also knew that he did not have the support of the Emperor or the Roman Catholic clergy. But, perhaps more important than this practical analysis, is Luther’s statement that the Bible must be free and that God must be allowed to use His Word freely with each person who hears it and reads it. In short, the Word of God has eternal value because it is the absolute truth!*

**“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained.”** (St. Paul in 2 Timothy 2:9)



The City of Worms, 1600

**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
*The Diet of Worms Papers*  
Letter to Emperor Charles V (Part 3 of 5)



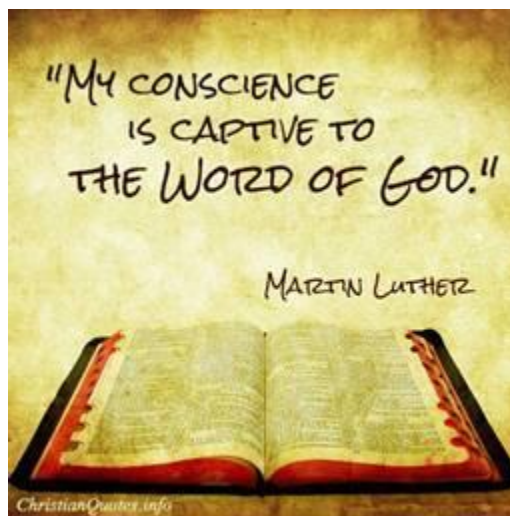
April 28, 1521

“Now in earthly things, which have nothing in common with the Word of God and with eternal values, we ought to trust each other...Concerning the Word of God and the eternal values, however, God does not allow this risk, that is, that man surrender the Word of God to man. For He has ordered that all men and all things should be submitted only to Him, as He alone has the glory of the truth and is truth Himself, while ‘every man’ is ‘false’ and in vain, as St. Paul excellently points out in Romans 3:4.

I most humbly beg Your Sacred Majesty, therefore, not to consider this decision concerning the Word of God as stemming from an evil motive, nor to interpret it harshly. My decision has arisen from the said Scripture passages to which every creature rightly yields. The authority of Scripture is greater than the comprehension of the whole of man’s reason, as St. Augustine says.”

**Reflection:** *No one knows on April 28 how the people of Germany will react to both Luther’s defeat at Worms and now his disappearance with a fate that is not known. I wonder how Emperor Charles V reacted to Luther’s explanation because of his young age of 20 and new position of authority. On the day following Luther’s statement, 400 nobles signed a proclamation supporting Luther and posted it on the doors of the City hall of Worms. We also clearly see Luther’s views on the free will of man as every decision and action of man without God is false or corrupted.*

*The quote from Romans 3:4 is interesting for a person who is not an ordained priest. The question is asked about Jews and Gentiles regarding the power and promises of God: ‘What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all!’*



**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
**The Diet of Worms Papers**  
Letter to Emperor Charles V (Part 4 of 5)



April 28, 1521

"I could in no way obtain a refutation of my little books on the basis of Scripture, and I was forced to leave without having been refuted. The whole controversy, as I have mentioned rests upon the fact that no one was willing to refute on the basis of Holy Scripture any erroneous articles of faith, which are supposed to be in my little books. No one gave me any hope or promise that an examination or an investigation of my little books would be conducted in the light of God's Word at some time in the future. Nevertheless I thank Your sacred Majesty most humbly for having so carefully observed the safe-conduct to Worms and for having pledged to uphold it until I arrived again at my quarters. I beg Your Sacred Majesty once more for Christ's sake not to allow me to be crushed by my enemies, to suffer violence and be condemned since I have so often made myself available, as is becoming to a Christian and obedient man."

**Reflection:** *Luther was granted 21 days of safe travel back to Wittenberg providing he did not preach, write, or disturb the peace in any way. This would be the time period of April 25 – May 15. Actually, Luther was protected by an Imperial herald, Kaspar Sturm, although he dismissed him as he left the City of Worms with his "kidnappers". Luther and Kaspar Sturm will meet again when they present the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V in 1530. (There is no record of his religious affiliation).*

*We continue to see Luther's frustration with the omission of challenging his writings in a debate or scholarly examination. In this excerpt he declares that he has won the debate by fiat, since no one challenged God's Word. Although this may appear insignificant by our standards, the challenge to scholastic reasoning by Biblical evidence is of historical and cultural significance. The decision at both Leipzig and Worms was that Luther was defeated, even though the votes were divided.*



Kaspar Sturm

(Imperial guard assigned to protect Luther from harm on his travel to Worms and back to Wittenberg)



**The Personal Letters of Martin Luther**  
**The Diet of Worms Papers**  
Letter to Emperor Charles V (Part 5 of 5)

A large, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Luther". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first letters of "Martin" and "Luther" being significantly larger and more prominent than the rest of the letters.

April 28, 1521

“For this reason, I now make my humble petition, not on my behalf (since I am of no importance) but on behalf of the whole church; it was my concern for the church that motivated me to send this letter after having left town. With my whole heart I desire, of course, that Your Sacred Majesty, the whole Empire, and the most noble German nation may be served in the best possible way, and all be preserved in God’s grace as happy people. Hitherto I have sought nothing but God’s glory and welfare (salvation) of all men. Even now I have not considered my own advantage, whether my opponents will condemn me or not. For if Christ my Lord prayed for his enemies while on the cross, how much more should I, with joy and trust in Christ, be concerned about and pray and plead for Your Sacred Majesty, for your Empire, for my most beloved superiors, and all native Germany. I expect nothing but the best from them, relying on my aforementioned offer.

With this I commend myself to the shelter of Your Sacred Majesty’s wings. May the Lord God guide and keep you for our well-being and happiness. Amen.”

Your Most Serene Majesty’s most dedicated supplicant,  
Martin Luther

**Reflection:** *An interesting conclusion which should spark many questions for discussion! Some of the questions that came to my mind are: 1) Should I interpret Luther’s reference to a German nation and prayer of salvation for all people as patronizing the most powerful secular ruler on the earth? 2) How should I interpret Luther’s reference to himself as having no importance to the manner of how he signed his letter as a supplicant or orator, as this implies Luther is a spokesperson for the people of the Empire? 3) Is Luther sincere in writing that he is praying for his enemies with joy and trust when he omits the pope and the clergy who opposed him?*

*Remember, Luther is on the run and is likely aware at this point of the plan to protect him from arrest and execution. Although his fate is still unknown, he knows the importance of the Emperor’s patience as support is unlikely. Luther cannot expect a reply to this letter as he will be in seclusion for an indefinite period.*



Martin Luther disguised as "Junker Jorg" while hiding at the Wartburg Castle