

PART 11

The Reformation

11.1 Erasmus: A Diatribe Against the Pope

Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1467–1536), the most renowned of all Northern Renaissance humanists, was Dutch by birth and educated in a school of the Brethren of the Common Life. He was a Biblical scholar, a popular author, and an astute critic of his society and the church, although he ultimately rejected the Protestant Reform. Published anonymously, the following diatribe is directed against Pope Julius II (r. 1503–13), who was known as the Warrior Pope.

Source: Wallace E. Adams, Richard B. Barlow, Gerald R. Kleinfeld, Ronald D. Smith, William W. Wootton, eds. *The Western World To 1700*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1969), pp. 372–74.

DIALOGUE: JULIUS LOCKED OUT OF HEAVEN

Persons Of The Dialogue: Pope Julius II, His Genius Or Guardian Angel, and St. Peter

Scene: Before the Gates of Heaven

- JULIUS: What's the trouble here? Won't the gates open? I believe the lock as been changed, or else it's jammed.
- GENIUS: Better check to see if you've brought the right key. The one for the treasury won't open this door, you know. But why didn't you bring both keys? This is the key of power, not of knowledge.
- JULIUS: Why, Hell, this is the only one I've ever used! I've never seen what good the other one was when I've had this one.
- GENIUS: Me neither, certainly, except that meanwhile we're locked out.
- JULIUS: I'm losing my temper. I'm going to beat on the gate. Hey there! Somebody open this door instantly! What's the matter, nobody here? What's holding up the doorman? Asleep, I suppose; probably drunk.
- GENIUS: [*Aside*] This fellow judges everyone by himself.
- PETER: It's a good thing we've got a steel door. Otherwise, whoever this is would break down the gates. It must be some giant, or satrap, some sacker of cities. Immortal God! What sewage is this I smell! Well, I certainly won't open the door. I'll just peek out this little barred window and see what kind of monster this is. What do you want? Who are you?
- JULIUS: If you knew your business, you would greet me with all the heavenly choirs.
- PETER: Rather demanding, isn't he? But first tell me who you are.
- JULIUS: As if you couldn't see who I am.
- PETER: See? I certainly see a new and never-before-seen spectacle, not to say a monster.
- JULIUS: If you are not completely blind, then, I suppose you know this key, even if you don't recognize the golden oak on my coat of arms. And you see the triple crown of the Papacy, besides my cloak, glittering all over with jewels and gold.
- PETER: Well, I recognize the silver key, all right, though to be sure there is only one, and it is much different from the keys that Christ, the true Pastor of the Church, once put into my keeping. But how should I recognize that crown, so proud that no barbarian tyrant would ever dare wear it, much less someone wishing to be admitted here? As for that cloak, it does nothing for me. I always kick jewels and gold out of the way, and spurn them like trash. But what's this? Here and there on the key and the crown and the cloak I see the marks of some wretched saloon keeper and impostor, a fellow with my name but not my ways: Simon [Magus], whom I once threw out from the following of Christ for simony.

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- JULIUS: Well, let these trifles go, if you're wise to them. Now I am, if you don't know, Julius the Ligurian, and if I'm not mistaken you recognize these two letters: P.M. You have learned to read, I presume?
- PETER: I guess they stand for *Pestis Maxima*, the Universal Calamity.
- GENIUS: Ha ha ha! This riddle-guesser hit the nail on the head.
- JULIUS: No, no! Pontifex Maxi us, the Pope's title.
- PETER: If you were three times maxi us and greater even than thrice-great Hermes, you wouldn't be allowed in here unless you were the best of all; that is, a saint.
- JULIUS: Well, if it is so necessary to be called a saint, you're being pretty arrogant to delay opening the gate for me, when you after all these centuries are only called *sanctus*—*saint* or holy—but nobody ever calls me anything but *sanctissimus*—most sainted, most holy. There are six-thousand bulls....
- GENIUS: Real bull!
- JULIUS: ... in which I am called not only most holy, but by the very name of holiness itself, whenever it pleased me.
- GENIUS: By the name of drunkard, too.
- JULIUS: I would make 'em call me the Holiest of the Most Holy Lord Julius.
- PETER: Well then, go demand heaven from those flatterers who made you "most holy." Let the same followers who gave you your holiness save you. Though I suppose you still think there is no difference between being called holy and being holy.
- JULIUS: I'm getting angry! If only I could live again, I'd show you about this business of not being holy and not being saved!
- PETER: Oh, there's an indication of a most holy mind! Although I have been watching you narrowly for a long time now, I've seen no sign of sanctity in you—nothing but impiety. Why have you led here this new, un-papal army? Here you have brought with you some twenty-thousand men, and I can't catch sight of a single one who has even a face that is Christian! I see a horrible flood of soldiers with you, smelling of nothing but brothels, drunkenness, and gun powder. I guess they are some kind of bandits, or rather fiends broken out of Hell to storm Heaven. As for you, the more I look the less trace of an apostle do I see about you. First of all, what monstrous thing is this, that you wear the garment of a priest and under it you bristle and rattle with bloody armor? And why such belligerent eyes, such a fierce mouth, such a menacing forehead, such proud and arrogant brows? It is shameful to say and painful to see that no part of your body is not spattered with the stains of prodigious and abominable pleasures. Not to mention that even now you are belching and smelling of hangover and drunkenness, and I just saw you [vomit]! The appearance of your whole person suggests that it is not with age and disease but through dissipation that you seem old, withered, and broken.
- GENIUS: How vividly he paints him in his true colors!...

Questions:

1. How does Pope Julius' conduct in office as described in the dialogue compare with Machiavelli's Renaissance prince?
2. On what grounds did St. Peter exclude Pope Julius from heaven?
3. How do these criticisms of Pope Julius compare to John Hus's condemnation of the papacy?