

# LETTER

Ulrich von Hutten (1480–1523)  
to Frederick III (1463–1525), Elector of Saxony

Ebernburg, 11 September 1520

We see that there is no gold and almost no silver in our German land. What little may perhaps be left is drawn away daily by the new schemes invented by the council of the most holy members of the Roman curia. What is thus squeezed out of us is put to the most shameful uses. Would you know, dear Germans, what employment I have myself seen that they make at Rome of our money? It does not lie idle! Leo the Tenth gives a part to nephews and relatives (these are so numerous that there is a proverb at Rome, "As thick as Leo's relations"). A portion is consumed by so many most reverend cardinals (of which the holy father created no less than one and thirty in a single day), as well as to support innumerable referendaries, auditors, proto-notaries, abbreviators, apostolic secretaries, chamberlains, and a variety of officials forming the élite of the great head church. These in turn draw after them, at untold expense, copyists, beadles, messengers, servants, scullions, mule drivers, grooms, and an innumerable army of prostitutes and of the most degraded followers. They maintain dogs, horses, monkeys, long-tailed apes, and many more such creatures for their pleasure. They construct houses all of marble. They have precious stones, are clothed in purple and fine linen, and dine sumptuously, frivolously indulging themselves in every species of luxury. In short, a vast number of the worst of men are supported in Rome in idle indulgence by means of our money.... Does not Your Grace perceive how many bold robbers, how many cunning hypocrites commit repeatedly the greatest crimes under the monk's cowl, and how many crafty hawks feign the simplicity of doves, and how many ravening wolves simulate the innocence of lambs? And although there be a few truly pious among them, even they cling to superstition, and pervert the law of life which Christ laid down for us.

Now, if all these who devastate Germany, and continue to devour everything, might once be driven out, and an end made of their unbridled plundering, swindling, and deception, with which the Romans have overwhelmed us, we should again have gold and silver in sufficient quantities, and should be able to keep it. And then this money, in such supply and value as it may be present, might be put to better uses, for example: to put on foot great armaments and extend the boundaries of the Empire; also that the Turks may be conquered, if this seems desirable; that many who, because of poverty, steal and rob may honestly earn their living once more, and that those who otherwise must starve may receive from the state contributions to mitigate their need; that scholars may be helped, and the study of the arts and sciences and of good literature be advanced; above all that every virtue may receive its reward; want be relieved at home; indolence banished, and deceit killed.

Then, too, the Bohemians, when they come to know this, will make common cause with us, for it was material obstacles alone that kept them back, in earlier times, from dealing with the avarice of their priests. The Greeks would do the same, who, unable to bear the Romish tyranny, have been for a long time, at the instigation of the Popes, regarded as heretics. The Russians would also become Christians and join us, they who, when recently they proposed to embrace Christianity, were repelled by the demand of His Holiness for a yearly tribute to be levied upon them of 400.000 ducats. Even the Turks would thereby hate us less; and no heathen, as formerly, would have occasion to molest us. For up to the present day the shameful lives of the heads of the Church have made the name of Christian hateful to all strangers.

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