



500TH
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

Martin Luther

95 *Theses*

Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the
Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (1517)

with an introduction by
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English translation from the 1983 edition of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses
Edited by Scot A. Kinnaman

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Quotations marked LW are from Luther's Works, American Edition (56 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86).

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INTRODUCTION

On January 15, 2009, a passenger jet left New York's LaGuardia Airport. Shortly after takeoff, it hit a flock of birds, disabling both of its engines. Despite the lack of thrust, the airliner's captain successfully guided his craft to a safe landing in the Hudson River. Few people had heard of that pilot, Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, before, but he became an overnight sensation.

Five centuries ago, something similar happened to a little-known Augustinian friar, Martin Luther. It occurred when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses, composed in Latin, to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

Quite a Sensation

Of course, electronic media did not exist during Luther's time. Yet through the cutting-edge communication technology of the day, printing via Gutenberg's movable type, Luther became well-known very quickly. Within a month or so, his Theses had been copied and translated into the language of the common people and were being discussed in other German cities. Luther, a thirty-four-year-old priest and professor of theology at the relatively new University of Wittenberg, was turning into quite a sensation.

Unlike Captain Sullenberger's nifty flying, Luther's posting of the Theses had not, in itself, been particularly heroic. The church door served as a sort of public bulletin board, especially for the university. Luther's Theses were propositions for academic discussion, the kind of thing that makes a lot of people yawn.

Luther never got the discussion he wanted. What followed was the Reformation. In fact, the Reformation is usually marked as beginning when Luther posted his Theses on October 31, 1517.

Indulgences

During the previous month, Wittenberg had seen a “Disputation against Scholastic Theology,” based on another set of theses by Luther. Many might indeed have yawned at this intellectual exercise. But people took notice when Luther turned to the very practical matter of indulgences.

Indulgences formed part of the penitential system. The church had defined the “sacrament of penance” as consisting of three elements:

1. Confession (resulting from contrition, sorrow over sin)
2. Absolution
3. Satisfaction through self-sacrificing deeds

Penitents needed to be freed not only from the guilt of their sin but also from temporal penalties incurred by their sin, and the church said these penalties would still have to be endured as satisfactions both in this world and beyond in purgatory. Purgatory was not hell, but a horrible, painful place of “purging,” where Christian souls were thought to remain for a time after death instead of immediately being with Christ in heaven (Luke 23:43). None knew just how long their own time of purgation was supposed to last.

Via indulgences, one could render satisfaction in a different way. Years before Luther, it became possible to buy indulgences as the third step in penance. The church had come to count on these payments of money as revenue sources, which struck disgruntled folk in German lands and elsewhere as no secret. They were getting tired of their money flowing to Rome.

The most sought after of all indulgences was the “plenary” (full) indulgence, which was claimed to remit all temporal punishments, even for Christians who had died and were putatively in purgatory. The idea had developed that the good works of Christ and the saints numbered more than they needed and formed a “treasury of merits,” and indulgence payments could transfer their surplus merits to people in purgatory. Purchase of a plenary indulgence for such a loved one was thought to spring that soul into heaven immediately.¹ Whether buying an indulgence for someone else or oneself, it became easy, Luther later recalled, to imagine that “the grace from indulgences was the same grace as that by which a man is reconciled to God.”²

¹ See Thesis 27.

² LW 41:232

These precise assertions were made by Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk who was selling plenary indulgences not far from Wittenberg in the fall of 1517. Some proceeds of his sales went to building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The sale had full approval from the pope and from Luther's more immediate ecclesiastical superior, Archbishop Albert of Mainz, who also benefited from the proceeds.

Luther's Ninety-Five Theses

Luther was convinced that the pope could never have authorized something like this. People in Wittenberg—his parishioners—were buying Tetzel's indulgences and thinking that they no longer had to be sorry for their sins. Who needed contrition if they had already "paid in advance"?

Something must be done, Luther thought. He wrote the Ninety-Five Theses.

The Theses started with penance: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said 'repent,' intended that the whole life of believers should be one of repentance."³ From his study of the Greek, Luther understood that repentance was more than participating in the formal sacrament of penance; it meant a life of penitential actions.

This put indulgences into perspective. They were not to take precedence over works of love for one's neighbor, subsequent Theses went on to say, nor were they to eclipse the grace of God. As Luther eventually put it, "The gospel, which is, after all, the only true indulgence, had to keep silence in the churches in deference to the indulgence."⁴

Yet in 1517, Luther still had much to learn about the biblical Gospel. By his own admission, at the time he did not want to take "a syllable from obedience to the pope."⁵ Luther was challenging various aspects of indulgences, particularly indulgences for the dead, but he had not yet thoroughly rejected indulgences.⁶ Nor did his Theses question purgatory. Some of them actually ran contrary to the Gospel: "True contrition seeks and loves punishment" or "For by a work of charity, charity increases and man becomes better."⁷ Even when he included the pointed query, "What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition have a right to full

³ Thesis 1

⁴ LW 34:16

⁵ LW 34:328

⁶ See Theses 71, 73, and 91.

⁷ Theses 40, 44

remission and participation?” Luther came to understand that he was granting too much to contrition while overlooking the forgiving Gospel of Christ as received through faith.⁸ By 1520, he wished all his booklets on indulgences would be burned.⁹ That would include his first writing on the subject, the Ninety-Five Theses.

Enduring Value

Yet these Theses have enduring value. They began with attention to the biblical text, the word *repent*. In the ensuing controversy, Luther grew more and more to depend on God’s Word, the Bible (*sola Scriptura!*), against ecclesiastical authorities like popes or councils.

The diligent biblical study that moved Luther to write the Ninety-Five Theses both resulted from and served as fuel for his personal devotion, his professorial work, and his pastoral interest in the care of souls—starting with his own. The Theses reflected his concern for certainty of salvation. As stated in what has been called the noblest of these Theses, “the true treasure of the Church is the most Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.”¹⁰

The Ninety-Five Theses formed a beginning. Luther went on to dig even further into his study of the biblical Gospel. Later he mused over how the Lord had been guiding him since the controversy over indulgences.

Luther had aimed to launch a discussion. To the extent that any discussion includes the genuine Gospel of Christ, it contains God’s saving power (Romans 1:16), which really cannot be contained. Not even after five hundred years!

⁸ Thesis 87

⁹ LW 36:11–12

¹⁰ Thesis 62

An English Translation of Martin Luther's 95 Theses

OCTOBER 31, 1517

Disputation Concerning the Power of Indulgence

Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary presiding. Those who cannot discuss the subject with us orally may do so in writing.

In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, *Poenitentiam agite* ["Repent"] (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

(Note: *Poenitentiam agite* is a quote from [Matthew 3:2](#) and [4:17](#) in Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Modern English translations have "repent," though *poenitentiam agite* literally means "do penance." Martin Luther begins his arguments against indulgences by making the point that there has been a mistranslation. He is saying that we should be living lives of repentance, not one of "doing penance.")

2. The word "repent" cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.

3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.

4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.

7. God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to the vicar, the priest.

8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to the canons themselves, nothing should be imposed on the dying.

9. Therefore the Holy Spirit through the pope is kind to us insofar as the pope in his decrees always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.

10. Those priests act ignorantly and wickedly who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penalties for purgatory.

11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept (Matthew 13:25).

12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.

13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.
14. Imperfect piety or love on the part of the dying person necessarily brings with it great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater the fear.
15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, to say nothing of other things, to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.
17. It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.
18. Furthermore, it does not seem proved, either by reason or by Scripture, that souls in purgatory are outside the state of merit, that is, unable to grow in love.
19. Nor does it seem proved that souls in purgatory, at least not all of them, are certain and assured of their own salvation, even if we ourselves may be entirely certain of it.
20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words "plenary remission of all penalties," does not actually mean "all penalties," but only those imposed by himself.
21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.
22. As a matter of fact, the pope remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to canon law, they should have paid in this life.
23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.
24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
25. That power which the pope has in general over purgatory corresponds to the power which any bishop or curate has in a particular way in his own diocese and parish.
26. The pope does very well when he grants remission to souls in purgatory, not by the power of the keys, which he does not have, but by way of intercession for them.
27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.
28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.
29. Who knows whether all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed, since we have exceptions in St. Severinus and St. Paschal, as related in a legend.
30. No one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition, much less of having received plenary remission.

31. The man who actually buys indulgences is as rare as he who is really penitent; indeed, he is exceedingly rare.
32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.
33. Men must especially be on guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to him.
34. For the graces of indulgences are concerned only with the penalties of sacramental satisfaction established by man.
35. They who teach that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges preach unchristian doctrine.
36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.
37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.
38. Nevertheless, papal remission and blessing are by no means to be disregarded, for they are, as I have said (Thesis 6), the proclamation of the divine remission.
39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.
40. A Christian who is truly contrite seeks and loves to pay penalties for his sins; the bounty of indulgences, however, relaxes penalties and causes men to hate them -- at least it furnishes occasion for hating them.
41. Papal indulgences must be preached with caution, lest people erroneously think that they are preferable to other good works of love.
42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend that the buying of indulgences should in any way be compared with works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences.
44. Because love grows by works of love, man thereby becomes better. Man does not, however, become better by means of indulgences but is merely freed from penalties.
45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.
46. Christians are to be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they must reserve enough for their family needs and by no means squander it on indulgences.
47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.

48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting indulgences, needs and thus desires their devout prayer more than their money.
49. Christians are to be taught that papal indulgences are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that the pope would and should wish to give of his own money, even though he had to sell the basilica of St. Peter, to many of those from whom certain hawkers of indulgences cajole money.
52. It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary, or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security.
53. They are the enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others.
54. Injury is done to the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word.
55. It is certainly the pope's sentiment that if indulgences, which are a very insignificant thing, are celebrated with one bell, one procession, and one ceremony, then the gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
56. The true treasures of the church, out of which the pope distributes indulgences, are not sufficiently discussed or known among the people of Christ.
57. That indulgences are not temporal treasures is certainly clear, for many indulgence sellers do not distribute them freely but only gather them.
58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints, for, even without the pope, the latter always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outer man.
59. St. Lawrence said that the poor of the church were the treasures of the church, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.
60. Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church, given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure.
61. For it is clear that the pope's power is of itself sufficient for the remission of penalties and cases reserved by himself.
62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.
63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last (Matthew 20:16).
64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.
65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.

66. The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.
67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.
68. They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.
69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of papal indulgences with all reverence.
70. But they are much more bound to strain their eyes and ears lest these men preach their own dreams instead of what the pope has commissioned.
71. Let him who speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed.
72. But let him who guards against the lust and license of the indulgence preachers be blessed.
73. Just as the pope justly thunders against those who by any means whatever contrive harm to the sale of indulgences.
74. Much more does he intend to thunder against those who use indulgences as a pretext to contrive harm to holy love and truth.
75. To consider papal indulgences so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God is madness.
76. We say on the contrary that papal indulgences cannot remove the very least of venial sins as far as guilt is concerned.
77. To say that even St. Peter if he were now pope, could not grant greater graces is blasphemy against St. Peter and the pope.
78. We say on the contrary that even the present pope, or any pope whatsoever, has greater graces at his disposal, that is, the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written, 1 Corinthians 12:28.
79. To say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy.
80. The bishops, curates, and theologians who permit such talk to be spread among the people will have to answer for this.
81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult even for learned men to rescue the reverence which is due the pope from slander or from the shrewd questions of the laity.
82. Such as: "Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial.
83. Again, "Why are funeral and anniversary masses for the dead continued and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded for them, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"

84. Again, "What is this new piety of God and the pope that for a consideration of money they permit a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God and do not rather, because of the need of that pious and beloved soul, free it for pure love's sake?"

85. Again, "Why are the penitential canons, long since abrogated and dead in actual fact and through disuse, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences as though they were still alive and in force?"

86. Again, "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?"

87. Again, "What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?"

88. Again, "What greater blessing could come to the church than if the pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once?"

89. "Since the pope seeks the salvation of souls rather than money by his indulgences, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons previously granted when they have equal efficacy?"

90. To repress these very sharp arguments of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, indulgences were preached according to the spirit and intention of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved. Indeed, they would not exist.

92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace! (Jeremiah 6:14)

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross!

94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, death and hell.

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace (Acts 14:22).

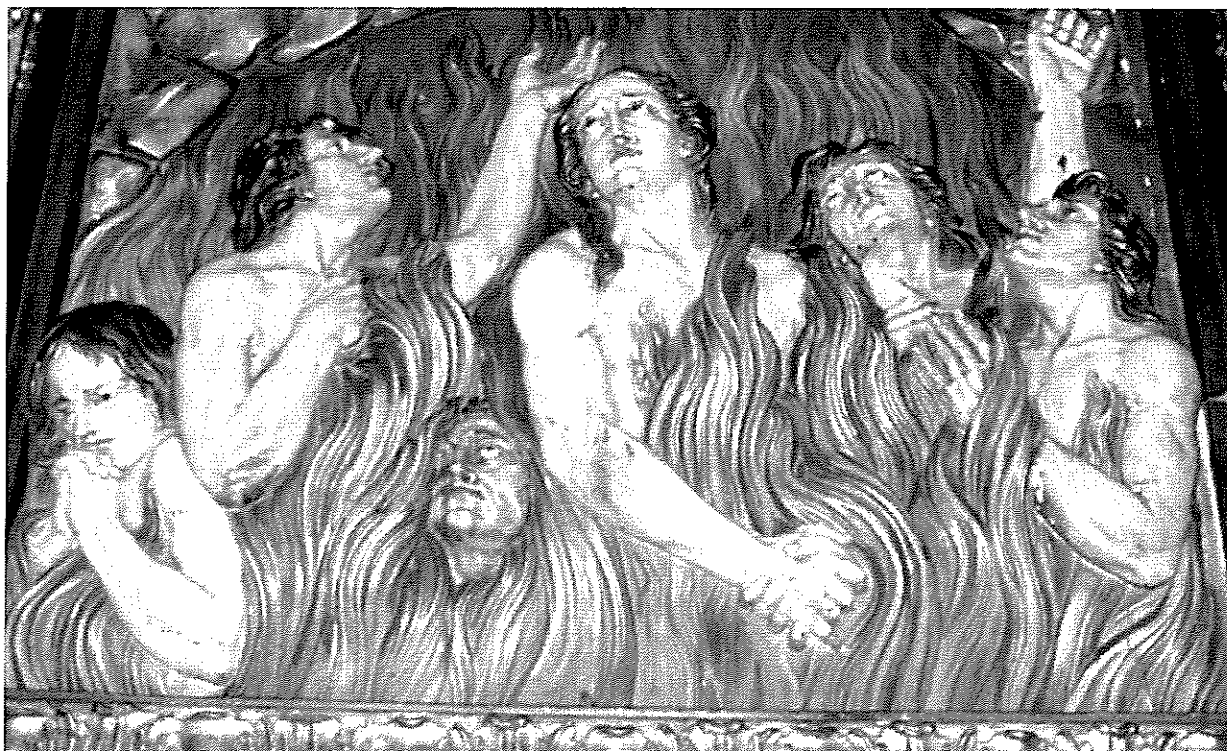
Evangelical

Tetzel on 7 Years in Purgatory for Every Sin

September 14, 2017 by Gene Veith

92 Comments

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I came across a sermon from Johann Tetzel, the indulgence peddler who provoked Luther's 95 Theses. Part of his sales pitch had to do with the popular, though unofficial, teaching that Christians must suffer 7 years in the fires of Purgatory for each sin they have committed. Doing the math reminds us of what it was like to be a western Christian in 1516.

Though Christ died for the sins of the world, according to classic Roman Catholicism, His sacrifice erases the penalty for original sin and for sins committed up to the time of Baptism. After that, Christians have recourse to the penitential system to deal with their sins. Catholics believe that even Christians can go to Hell, if they commit mortal sins. These can be forgiven, though, through the sacrament of Reconciliation, involving private confession before a priest, acts of penance, and absolution. That removes the *eternal punishment* that the sin deserves. But all sins, including the more minor venial sins, require *temporal punishment*. Earthly suffering can count for this, but most of the temporal punishment—which is necessary even for sins that have been forgiven—happens after death in Purgatory.

Ironically, some evangelicals today are trying to recover the doctrine of Purgatory (see [this book](#) and [this book](#)). But medieval Catholicism did not think of Purgatory in terms of C. S. Lewis's cleansing shower washing off the grime. It is punishment. It is excruciating pain. Specifically, it is *fire*, the same as in Hell, with the crucial difference is that purgatorial fire is temporary. (Go [here](#) for a popular version of Catholic teachings on the

subject.)

But “temporary” can mean a long, long time. Based on reports from visions of saints (see the quotation from [St. Francis of Rome in this more recent vision](#)), it has been widely taught that each sin must be punished by seven years of purgatorial fire. This is what Tetzel refers to, below, but I recall hearing it from Mother Angelica of EWTN and other conservative Catholics today. The Church has never officially specified a set time, as far as I know. I have heard contemporary Catholics say that since we will be outside of time after death, the experience of Purgatory will seem as if it is over in an instant. But the theology of Purgatory requires a *temporal* punishment. Some conservative Catholics say it might be more like an hour for each sin, but they agree that this will amount to many years, even centuries in the fire. (See [this](#) and [this](#).)

So if Tetzel and St. Francis of Rome are right—as many if not most Christians believed in the medieval church—let’s do the math. Assume that seven years in purgatory are required for each sin. Say you are a very good person and only commit one sin per day. That comes to 2,555 years in purgatory for one year of sinning. If you live to be 70, you would be facing 178,850 years of suffering.

This would be for sins that are *forgiven!*

This time can be reduced, though. This is why it is important to pray for the dead, imploring God’s grace that He remit or shorten the time that one’s loved ones must be in Purgatory. Offering masses in the name of the dead is a good work that can help considerably. (Wealthy Christians with many sins on their consciences would endow whole chapters of monks or nuns to offer regular masses and to pray continually for their souls, which in many cases has continued for centuries to this very day. Which is fitting because, to their minds, they are likely still in Purgatory.)

Also, the Church administers what was called “the Treasury of Merits.” Saints—defined as those whom we know are already in Heaven—have built up more merits than they need for salvation. These merits may be applied to other Christians to count against their allotted time in Purgatory. These could be granted by papal decree. This was the basis for indulgences.

One might earn an indulgence, measured in hours or days or years taken off of Purgatory, in many ways. Pray this prayer ten times to a certain saint, and you would be remitted 40 years from Purgatory. Go on a pilgrimage to a certain church during a Jubilee Year and you might receive 500 years of remittance. Frederick the Wise had such a large collection of relics that venerating them all would merit [1,902,202 years](#) out of Purgatory. (It’s a sign of his integrity that he backed Luther even though the reformer rendered his lucrative collection worthless!)

Eventually, indulgences were sold, a practice halted by the Council of Trent, though indulgences remain a part of Catholic piety to this day. Tetzel’s indulgences had the marketing advantage of being “plenary.” That is, they remitted *all* of the purgatorial penalty! For the price of a week’s wages (if you were an artisan—the price went up according to your social rank), you could escape Purgatory completely! Another week’s wages could release your late father. Then your grandfather. Perhaps you could buy one for your wife and one for your child.

With this background, here is Tetzel’s sermon. From [Tetzel’s Sermon On Preaching Indulgences: Western Civilization I](#):

Tetzel’s Sermon on Preaching Indulgences

You may obtain letters of safe conduct from the vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which you are able to liberate your soul from the hands of the enemy, and convey it by means of contrition and confession, safe and secure from all pains of Purgatory, into the happy kingdom. For know, that in these letters are stamped and engraven all the merits of Christ’s passion there laid bare. Consider, that for each and every mortal sin it is necessary to undergo seven years of penitence after confession and contrition, either in this life or in Purgatory.

How many mortal sins are committed in a day, how many in a week, how many in a month, how many in a year, how many in the whole extent of life! They are well-nigh numberless, and those that commit them must needs suffer endless punishment in the burning pains of Purgatory.

But with these confessional letters you will be able at any time in life to obtain full indulgence for all penalties imposed upon you, in all cases except the four reserved to the Apostolic See. Thence throughout your whole life, whenever you wish to make confession, you may receive the same remission, except in cases reserved to the Pope, and afterwards, at the hour of death, a full indulgence as to all penalties and sins, and your share of all spiritual blessings that exist in the church militant and all its members.

Do you not know that when it is necessary for anyone to go to Rome, or undertake any other dangerous journey, he takes his money to a broker and gives a certain per cent—five or six or ten—in order that at Rome or elsewhere he may receive again his funds intact, by means of the letters of this same broker? Are you not willing, then, for the fourth part of a florin, to obtain these letters, by virtue of which you may bring, not your money, but your divine and immortal soul, safe and sound into the land of Paradise?

Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History, vol II, no. 6 (Philadelphia: The Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1907), pp. 4-5.

Imagine believing this! That after death, you faced centuries if not millennia of excruciating torment in the fires of Purgatory. This was for Christians! This was for sins that were forgiven! Sins that you knew Christ had died for! Sins that you dutifully confessed, did penance, and received absolution for!

Christians who believed this must have lived under enormous spiritual torment. They must have compartmentalized their lives in order to prevent themselves from being overwhelmed.

Evangelicals who are trying to bring back Purgatory insist that souls will want to be cleansed before arriving into Heaven. But those who actually lived with this belief tried desperately to get out of it. It wasn't just that the church was teaching salvation by works. It was teaching that we must still pay the penalty for our own sins.

If God, if sufficiently implored, might of His grace release souls from Purgatory before their time by setting aside the punishment for some of their sins, why wouldn't a gracious God set aside all their punishment?

If the merit of the saints could be imputed to sinners, thus freeing them from punishment for their sins, why could not the infinite merit of Jesus Christ be imputed to sinners, completely removing the necessity of Purgatory?

Do you see why Luther's proclamation of the Gospel—that Christ bore the sins of the world *and suffered their penalty*, that God grants salvation by His grace alone, that forgiveness is really forgiveness—was and is such good news?

Illustration: Souls in Purgatory, Altarpiece in Basilica of the Annunciation of Our Lady of Lequeitio, Spain, by Zarateman (Own work) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

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