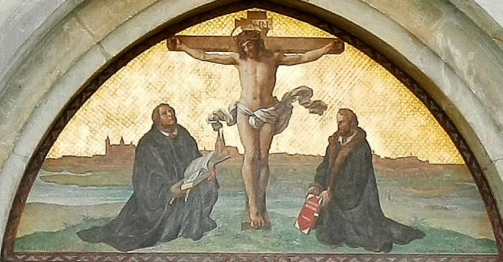


QUAE SACRORUM SEDES
EMENDATORUM BELLII
DIRUTA FLAMMIS III.
EID OCTOBR. CIOCCCLX
MAXIMO NOS MOERO
RE AFFECTIT.

ANNI X. FINE PROS-
PERE PERACTO NUNC
PULCHROR SURREXIT
SOLI DEO CONSECRATA
VIII EID. AUG.
CIOCCCLXX.



FRIDERIGVS · GVILELMS IV · REX · PORTAV
OCTOBR · D · XXII · INDVLGENTIS · ROMANIS
RETORVATIONES · SACROVM · PRAEVNTAS
VAIVS · EX · AERE · FIERI · ATQVE · ILLAS · THESE
A · OVA · MARTINVS · LV · THIERS · A · DOM · MDXXII
M · P · GNANDIS · THESE · AFF · IAT · LV · XXXV
M · EN · DIO · V · STAT · AB · RET · ET · SIG · IS · EM · OR · XVI
IN · SCR · I · B · I · S · S · I · A · DOM · M · D · CC · CL · VII

Heaven
for
Sale

Heaven for Sale

A Survey of the Causes Fracturing the
Unity of Christianity

Cover: Theses Doors Schlosskirche
Wittenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

FRANK ARUNDELL

Heaven for Sale

A Survey of the Causes Fracturing the Unity of Christianity

Adjective: indulgent

Characterized by (allowing oneself) or another, to have or do what they want, especially when this is not good for them. (Cambridge Dictionary, modified)

Most of us see an occasional indulgence as a good thing. Who will not indulge himself or herself now and then, with something that pleases or brings happiness into our existence; into our every day lives? Who will not be comforted by being indulged by another? Generally speaking, indulgence is a welcome, peaceful endeavor or circumstance. But, like everything else in life, too much of a good thing can easily become a bad thing. An indulgence is an allowance one gives to oneself or to another, or accepts from another. Temperance appears to be the guardian over excessive indulgences. “Temperance is defined as moderation or voluntary self-restraint. It is typically described in terms of what an individual voluntarily refrains from doing. (Wikipedia)

In today’s culture, temperance with regard to indulgence seems to be an old fashioned (conservative) idea. In a materialist society the tendency is to maximize indulgence. Full emersion in pleasure is paramount; all pain, both physical and mental, is to be eliminated. One need only look at the use of drugs for

Heaven for Sale

every kind of discomfort much beyond reasonable medication proves the point. You might ask; what has all of this got to do with the granting of “indulgences” by the Roman Catholic Church for money? Wouldn’t that be presumptuously selling the “grace” of God as Judas sold out Jesus? In our opinion, yes it would, and it did happen, But is it the “Church” that conjunctively retains the guilt of such a devastating split in Christendom. Indulgence is a good thing, but by the allowance of granting spiritual gifts (indulgences) for money by the Medici Pope Leo X through his agents, in the fifteenth and sixteenth Century, indulgence for the temporal punishment due to sin went off the rails, and is the primal cause of the catastrophe. The question must be asked: Just what is it the Roman Catholic Church that makes it unique among all the other Christian denominations? dictionary.com says: The Roman Catholic Church. is “the branch of Christianity headed by the pope governed by a hierarchy with the pope at the top and, at the lower levels, bishops and priests.” One wonders what happened to the laity. If the tree analogy is proper for this definition the – Roman Catholic Church would have to be considered the root by reasonable people.

NOTE:

Pope Leo X (11 December 1475 – 1 December 1521), born Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, was Pope from 9 March 1513 to his death in 1521.[1]

The second son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, ruler of the Florentine Republic, he was elevated to the cardinalate in 1489. Following the death of Pope Julius II, Giovanni was elected pope after securing the backing of the younger members of the Sacred College. Early on in his rule he oversaw the closing sessions of the Fifth Council of the Lateran, but struggled to implement the reforms agreed. In 1517 he led a costly war that succeeded in securing his nephew as Duke of Urbino, but which reduced papal finances.

Heaven for Sale

In Protestant circles, Leo is associated with granting indulgences for those who donated to reconstruct St. Peter's Basilica, a practice that was soon challenged by Martin Luther's 95 Theses, following his visit to Rome in 1511. He refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the demands of what would become the Protestant Reformation, and his Papal Bull of 1520, *Exsurge Domine*, condemned Martin Luther's condemnatory stance, rendering ongoing communication difficult. Notwithstanding these divisions, he granted establishment to the Oratory of Divine Love.

He borrowed and spent money without circumspection. A significant patron of the arts, upon election Leo is alleged to have said, "Since God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it." Under his reign, progress was made on the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica and artists such as Raphael decorated the Vatican rooms. Leo also reorganized the Roman University, and promoted the study of literature, poetry and antiquities. He died in 1521 and is buried in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome. He was the last pope not to have been in priestly orders at the time of his election to the papacy.(Wikipedia)

Catechetical Explanation from Vatican II

X. INDULGENCES

1471 The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance.

What is an indulgence?

“An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.”

“An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin.”⁸² The

Heaven for Sale

faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead.”

The punishments of sin

1472 To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a double consequence. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.

1473 The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the “old man” and to put on the “new man.”

In the Communion of Saints

1474 The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. “The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person.”

Heaven for Sale

1475 In the communion of saints, “a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things.” In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.

1476 We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the Church's treasury, which is “not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the ‘treasury of the Church’ is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy.

1477 “This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body.”

Obtaining indulgence from God through the Church

1478 An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by

Heaven for Sale

Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.

1479 Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.

By taking spirituality out of the concept of indulgences, it's easy to see when money was added as a contractual enterprise the whole thing was construed as a scam, or worse a grave sin. Christians, especially Catholic Christians, must understand what the Church is despite its current structural disunity as a result of the conflict between Luther and Leo. One might ask: how is it possible for this "institution", Catholic or otherwise, to speak or act in place of God? Jesus speaks of this unity and warranty very clearly in the gospel of John:

I do not ask for these [the apostles and their followers] only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [All of us] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, [faith as a product of grace] that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

(John 17: 20-23)

Heaven for Sale

Now if we are to be “one” as The Father, Son and Spirit are One in the Holy Trinity, we would most certainly be inaugurated into the “Kingdom of God” as “The People of God” after Baptism. It would be very difficult to think of each of us as an individual “church” unto himself or herself regardless of being “spiritual” without the earthly institution which the Lord had established on Peter. We know, of course, even he was not an angel; but stepped up to his commission after the Ascension and Pentecost aided by the conversion of St. Paul, without whom things might have been quite different. We are all hearers of the Word, only through the church which Christ instituted and the Apostles launched. The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul or Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul is a liturgical feast in honor of their martyrdom in Rome. The celebration is of ancient origin. Many people today see themselves as unitarily religious; since they somehow know God is with them—and that’s really all they need. One wonders how the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, also instituted by Christ, can become a part of their lives. *“Take this all of you and eat of it, for this is my body given up for you” ...*

No one can argue conscience at this point. No one can tell but God, through Christ in the Spirit what is in the hearts of men and women; but we must see what other men have thought regarding the argument between Leo and Luther; sadly setting in motion the practices that caused the fracturing of Christianity on a grand scale.

NOTE:

James Anthony Froude (23 April 1818 – 20 October 1894) was an English historian, novelist, biographer, and editor of Fraser's Magazine. From his upbringing amidst the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, Froude intended to become a clergyman, but doubts about the doctrines of the Anglican church, published in his scandalous 1849 novel *The Nemesis of Faith*, drove him to abandon

Heaven for Sale

his religious career. Froude turned to writing history, becoming one of the best known historians of his time for his History of England from the fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada.[3] Inspired by Thomas Carlyle, Froude's historical writings were often fiercely polemical, earning him a number of outspoken opponents. (Wikipedia)

Times of Erasmus and Luther: Three Lectures by James Anthony Froude

Delivered at Newcastle, 1867: From Lecture II:

You remember what I told you about indulgences. The notable device of his Holiness was to send distinguished persons about Europe with sacks of indulgences. Indulgences and dispensations! Dispensations to eat meat on fast-days — dispensations to marry one's near relation — dispensations for anything and everything which the faithful might wish to purchase who desired forbidden pleasures. The dispensations were simply scandalous. The indulgences — well, if a pious Catholic is asked nowadays what they were, he will say that they were the remission of the penances which the Church inflicts upon earth; but it is also certain that they would have sold cheap if the people had thought that this was all that they were to get by them. As the thing was represented by the spiritual hawkers who disposed of these wares, they were letters of credit on heaven. When the great book was opened, the people believed that these papers would be found entire on the right side of the account. Debtor — so many murders, so many robberies, lies, slanders, or debaucheries. Creditor — the merits of the saints placed to the account of the delinquent by the Pope's letters, in consideration of value received.

Heaven for Sale

This is the way in which the pardon system was practically worked. This is the way in which it is worked still, where the same superstitions remain.

If one had asked Pope Leo whether he really believed in these pardons of his, he would have said officially that the Church had always held that the Pope had power to grant them.

Had he told the truth, he would have added privately that if the people chose to be fools, it was not for him to disappoint them.

The Pope had bought the support of the Archbishop of Mayence, Erasmus's friend, by promising him half the spoil which was gathered in his province. The agent was the Dominican monk Tetzel, whose name has acquired a forlorn notoriety in European history.

His stores were opened in town after town. He entered in state. The streets everywhere were hung with flags. Bells were pealed; nuns and monks walked in procession before and after him, while he himself sate in a chariot, with the Papal Bull on a velvet cushion in front of him. The sale-rooms were the churches. The altars were decorated, the candles lighted, the arms of St. Peter blazoned conspicuously on the roof. Tetzel from the pulpit explained the efficacy of his medicines; and if any profane person doubted their power, he was threatened with excommunication.

Acolytes walked through the crowds, clinking their plates and crying, 'Buy! Buy!' The business went as merry as a marriage bell till the Dominican came near to Wittenberg.

Heaven for Sale

Half a century before, such a spectacle would have excited no particular attention. The few who saw through the imposition would have kept their thoughts to themselves; the many would have paid their money, and in a month all would have been forgotten.

A generation had grown to manhood of whom the Church authorities knew nothing; and the whole air of Germany, unsuspected by pope or prelate, was charged with electricity.

Had Luther stood alone, he, too, would probably have remained silent. What was he, a poor, friendless, solitary monk, that he should set himself against the majesty of the triple crown?

However hateful the walls of a dungeon, a man of sense confined alone there does not dash his hands against the stones.

But Luther knew that his thoughts were the thoughts of thousands. Many wrong things, as we all know, have to be endured in this world. Authority is never very angelic; and moderate injustice, a moderate quantity of lies, is more tolerable than anarchy.

But it is with human things as it is with the great icebergs which drift southward out of the frozen seas. They swim two-thirds under water, and one-third above; and so long as the equilibrium is sustained, you would think that they were as stable as the rocks. But the sea-water is warmer than the air. Hundreds of fathoms down, the tepid current washes the base of the berg. Silently in those far deeps the centre of gravity is changed; and then, in a moment, with one vast roll, the enormous mass heaves over, and the crystal peaks which had

Heaven for Sale

been glancing so proudly in the sunlight, are buried in the ocean for ever.

Such a process as this had been going on in Germany, and Luther knew it, and knew that the time was come for him to speak. Fear had not kept him back. The danger to himself would be nonetheless because he would have the people at his side. The fiercer the thunderstorm, the greater peril to the central figure who stands out above the rest exposed to it. But he saw that there was hope at last of a change; and for himself — as he said in the plague — if he died, he died.

Erasmus admitted frankly for himself that he did not like danger. ‘As to me,’ he wrote to Archbishop Warham, ‘I have no inclination to risk my life for truth. We have not all strength for martyrdom; and if trouble come, I shall imitate St. Peter. Popes and emperors must settle the creeds. If they settle them well, so much the better; if ill, I shall keep on the safe side.’

That is to say, truth was not the first necessity to Erasmus. He would prefer truth, if he could have it. If not, he could get on moderately well upon falsehood. Luther could not. No matter what the danger to himself, if he could smite a lie upon the head and kill it, he was better pleased than by a thousand lives. We hear much of Luther’s doctrine about faith. Stripped of theological verbiage, that doctrine means this.

Reason says that, on the whole, truth and justice are desirable things. They make men happier in themselves, and make society more prosperous. But their reason ends, and men will not die for principles of utility. Faith says that between truth and lies, there is an infinite difference: one is of God, the other of Satan; one is eternally to be loved, the other eternally to be

Heaven for Sale

abhorred. It cannot say why, in language intelligible to reason. It is the voice of the nobler nature in man speaking out of his heart.

While Tetzel, with his bull and his gilt car, was coming to Wittenberg, Luther, loyal still to authority while there was a hope that authority would be on the side of right, wrote to the Archbishop of Mayence to remonstrate.

The archbishop, as we know, was to have a share of Tetzel's spoils; and what were the complaints of a poor insignificant monk to a supreme archbishop who was in debt and wanted money?

The Archbishop of Mayence flung the letter into his waste-paper basket; and Luther made his solemn appeal from earthly dignitaries to the conscience of the German people. He set up his protest on the church door at Wittenberg; and, in ninety-five propositions he challenged the Catholic Church to defend Tetzel and his works.

The Pope's indulgences, he said, cannot take away sins. God alone remits sins; and He pardons those who are penitent, without help from man's absolutions.

The Church may remit penalties which the Church inflicts. But the Church's power is in this world only, and does not reach to purgatory.

If God has thought fit to place a man in purgatory, who shall say that it is good for him to be taken out of purgatory? Who shall say that he himself desires it?

Heaven for Sale

True repentance does not shrink from chastisement. True repentance rather loves chastisement.

The bishops are asleep. It is better to give to the poor than to buy indulgences; and he who sees his neighbor in want, and instead of helping his neighbor buys a pardon for himself, is doing what is displeasing to God. Who is this man who dares to say that for so many crowns the soul of a sinner can be made whole?

These, and like these, were Luther's propositions. Little guessed the Catholic prelates the dimensions of the act which had been done. The Pope, when he saw the theses, smiled in good-natured contempt. 'A drunken German wrote them,' he said; 'when he has slept off his wine, he will be of another mind.'

Tetzel bayed defiance; the Dominican friars took up the quarrel; and Hochstrat of Cologne, Reuchlin's enemy, clamoured for fire and faggot.

Voice answered voice. The religious houses all Germany over were like kennels of hounds howling to each other across the spiritual waste. If souls could not be sung out of purgatory, their occupation was gone.

Luther wrote to Pope Leo to defend himself; Leo cited him to answer for his audacity at Rome; while to the young laymen, to the noble spirits all Europe over, Wittenberg became a beacon of light shining in the universal darkness.

It was a trying time to Luther. Had he been a smaller man, he would have been swept away by his sudden popularity — he

Heaven for Sale

would have placed himself at the head of some great democratic movement, and in a few years his name would have disappeared in the noise and smoke of anarchy.

But this was not his nature. His fellow-townsmen were heartily on his side. He remained quietly at his post in the Augustine Church at Wittenberg. If the powers of the world came down upon him and killed him, he was ready to be killed. Of himself at all times he thought infinitely little; and he believed that his death would be as serviceable to truth as his life.

Killed undoubtedly he would have been if the clergy could have had their way. It happened, however, that Saxony just then was governed by a prince of no common order. Were all princes like the Elector Frederick, we should have no need of democracy in this world — we should never have heard of democracy. The clergy could not touch Luther against the will of the Wittenberg senate, unless the Elector would help them; and, to the astonishment of everybody, the Elector was disinclined to consent. The Pope himself wrote to exhort him to his duties. The Elector still hesitated. His professed creed was the creed in which the Church had educated him; but he had a clear secular understanding outside his formulas. When he read the propositions, they did not seem to him the pernicious things which the monks said they were. ‘There is much in the Bible about Christ,’ he said, ‘but not much about Rome.’ He sent for Erasmus, and asked him what he thought about the matter.

The Elector knew to whom he was speaking. He wished for a direct answer, and looked Erasmus full and broad in the face. Erasmus pinched his thin lips together. ‘Luther,’ he said at length, ‘has committed two sins: he has touched the Pope’s crown and the monks’ bellies.’

Heaven for Sale

He generously and strongly urged Frederick not to yield for the present to Pope Leo's importunity; and the Pope was obliged to try less hasty and more formal methods.

He had wished Luther to be sent to him to Rome, where his process would have had a rapid end. As this could not be, the case was transferred to Augsburg, and a cardinal legate was sent from Italy to look into it.

There was no danger of violence at Augsburg. The townspeople there and everywhere were on the side of freedom; and Luther went cheerfully to defend himself. He walked from Wittenberg. You can fancy him still in his monk's brown frock, with all his wardrobe on his back — an apostle of the old sort. The citizens, high and low, attended him to the gates, and followed him along the road, crying 'Luther for ever!' 'Nay,' he answered, 'Christ for ever!'

The cardinal legate, being reduced to the necessity of politeness, received him civilly. He told him, however, simply and briefly, that the Pope insisted on his recantation, and would accept nothing else. Luther requested the cardinal to point out to him where he was wrong. The cardinal waived discussion. 'He was come to command,' he said, 'not to argue.' And Luther had to tell him that it could not be.

Remonstrances, threats, entreaties, even bribes were tried. Hopes of high distinction and reward were held out to him if he would only be reasonable. To the amazement of the proud Italian, a poor peasant's son — a miserable friar of a provincial German town — was prepared to defy the power and resist the prayers of the Sovereign of Christendom. 'What,' said the

Heaven for Sale

cardinal at last to him, ‘do you think the Pope cares for the opinion of a German boor? The Pope’s little finger is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defend you — you, a wretched worm like you? I tell you, No! And where will you be then — where will you be then?’

Luther answered, ‘Then, as now, in the hands of Almighty God.’

The Court dissolved. The cardinal carried back his report to his master. The Pope, so defied, brought out his thunders; he excommunicated Luther; he wrote again to the elector, entreating him not to soil his name and lineage by becoming a protector of heretics; and he required him, without further ceremony, to render up the criminal to justice.

The elector’s power was limited. As yet, the quarrel was simply between Luther and the Pope. The elector was by no means sure that his bold subject was right — he was only not satisfied that he was wrong — and it was a serious question with him how far he ought to go. The monk might next be placed under the ban of the empire; and if he persisted in protecting him afterwards, Saxony might have all the power of Germany upon it. He did not venture any more to refuse absolutely. He temporized and delayed; while Luther himself, probably at the elector’s instigation, made overtures for peace to the Pope. Saving his duty to Christ, he promised to be for the future an obedient son of the Church, and to say no more about indulgences if Tetzl ceased to defend them. ‘

My being such a small creature,’ Luther said afterwards, ‘was a misfortune for the Pope. He despised me too much! What, he thought, could a slave like me do to him — to him, who was

Heaven for Sale

the greatest man in all the world. Had he accepted my proposal, he would have extinguished me?’

But the infallible Pope conducted himself like a proud, irascible, exceedingly fallible mortal. To make terms with the town preacher of Wittenberg was too preposterous.

Just then the imperial throne fell vacant; and the pretty scandal I told you of, followed at the choice of his successor. Frederick of Saxony might have been elected if he had liked — and it would have been better for the world perhaps if Frederick had been more ambitious of high dignities — but the Saxon Prince did not care to trouble himself with the imperial scepter. The election fell on Maximilian’s grandson Charles — grandson also of Ferdinand the Catholic — Sovereign of Spain; Sovereign of Burgundy and the Low Countries; Sovereign of Naples and Sicily; Sovereign, beyond the Atlantic, of the New Empire of the Indies.

No fitter man could have been found to do the business of the Pope. With the empire of Germany added to his inherited dominions, who could resist him?

To the new emperor, unless the elector yielded, Luther’s case had now to be referred.

The elector, if he had wished, could not interfere. Germany was attentive, but motionless. The students, the artisans, the tradesmen, were at heart with the Reformer; and their enthusiasm could not be wholly repressed. The press grew fertile with pamphlets; and it was noticed that all the printers and compositors went for Luther. The Catholics could not get

Heaven for Sale

their books into type without sending them to France or the Low Countries.

Yet none of the princes except the elector had as yet shown him favor. The bishops were hostile to a man. The nobles had given no sign; and their place would be naturally on the side of authority. They had no love for bishops — there was hope in that; and they looked with no favor on the huge estates of the religious orders. But no one could expect that they would peril their lands and lives for an insignificant monk.

There was an interval of two years before the emperor was at leisure to take up the question. The time was spent in angry altercation, boding no good for the future.

The Pope issued a second bull condemning Luther and his works. Luther replied by burning the bull in the great square at Wittenberg.

At length, in April 1521, the Diet of the Empire assembled at Worms, and Luther was called to defend himself in the presence of Charles the Fifth.

That it should have come to this at all, in days of such high-handed authority, was sufficiently remarkable. It indicated something growing in the minds of men, that the so-called Church was not to carry things any longer in the old style. Popes and bishops might order, but the laity intended for the future to have opinions of their own how far such orders should be obeyed.

The Pope expected anyhow that the Diet, by fair means or foul, would now rid him of his adversary. The elector, who knew the

Heaven for Sale

ecclesiastical ways of handling such matters, made it a condition of his subject appearing, that he should have a safe conduct, under the emperor's hand; that Luther, if judgment went against him, should be free for the time to return to the place from which he had come; and that he, the elector, should determine afterwards what should be done with him.

When the interests of the Church were concerned, safe conducts, it was too well known, were poor security. Pope Clement the Seventh, a little after, when reproached for breaking a promise, replied with a smile, 'The Pope has power to bind and to loose.' Good, in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities, meant what was good for the Church; evil, whatever was bad for the Church; and the highest moral obligation became sin when it stood in St. Peter's way.

There had been an outburst of free thought in Bohemia a century and a half before. John Huss, Luther's forerunner, came with a safe conduct to the Council of Constance; but the bishops ruled that safe conducts could not protect heretics. They burnt John Huss for all their promises, and they hoped now that so good a Catholic as Charles would follow so excellent a precedent. Pope Leo wrote himself to beg that Luther's safe conduct should not be observed. The bishops and archbishops, when Charles consulted them, took the same view as the Pope.

'There is something in the office of a bishop,' Luther said, a year or two later, 'which is dreadfully demoralizing. Even good men change their natures at their consecration; Satan enters into them as he entered into Judas, as soon as they have taken the sop.'

Heaven for Sale

It was most seriously likely that, if Luther trusted himself at the Diet on the faith of his safe conduct, he would never return alive. Rumors of intended treachery were so strong, that if he refused to go, the elector meant to stand by him at any cost. Should he appear, or not appear? It was for himself to decide. If he stayed away, judgment would go against him by default. Charles would call out the forces of the empire, and Saxony would be invaded.

Civil war would follow, with insurrection all over Germany, with no certain prospect except bloodshed and misery.

Luther was not a man to expose his country to peril that his own person might escape. He had provoked the storm; and if blood was to be shed, his blood ought at least to be the first. He went. On his way, a friend came to warn him again that foul play was intended, that he was condemned already, that his books had been burnt by the hangman, and that he was a dead man if he proceeded.

Luther trembled — he owned it — but he answered, ‘Go to Worms! I will go if there are as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon the roofs of the houses.’

The roofs, when he came into the city, were crowded, not with devils, but with the inhabitants, all collecting there to see him as he passed. A nobleman gave him shelter for the night; the next day he was led to the Town Hall.

No more notable spectacle had been witnessed in this planet for many a century — not, perhaps, since a greater than Luther stood before the Roman Procurator.

Heaven for Sale

There on the raised dais sate the sovereign of half the world. There on either side of him stood the archbishops, the ministers of state, the princes of the empire, gathered together to hear and judge the son of a poor miner, who had made the world ring with his name.

The body of the hall was thronged with knights and nobles — stern hard men in dull gleaming armor. Luther, in his brown frock, was led forward between their ranks. The looks which greeted him were not all unfriendly. The first Article of a German credo was belief in courage. Germany had had its feuds in times past with Popes of Rome, and they were not without pride that a poor countryman of theirs should have taken by the beard the great Italian priest. They had settled among themselves that, come what would, there should be fair play; and they looked on half admiring, and half in scorn.

As Luther passed up the hall, a steel baron touched him on the shoulder with his gauntlet. ‘

Pluck up thy spirit, little monk;’ he said, ‘some of us here have seen warm work in our time, but, by my troth, nor I nor any knight in this company ever needed a stout heart more than thou neediest it now. “If thou hast faith in these doctrines of thine, little monk, go on, in the name of God.”’

‘Yes, in the name of God,’ said Luther, throwing back his head, ‘In the name of God, forward!’

As at Augsburg, one only question was raised. Luther had broken the laws of the Church. He had taught doctrines which the Pope had declared to be false. Would he or would he not retract?

Heaven for Sale

As at Augsburg, he replied briefly that he would retract when his doctrines were not declared to be false merely, but were proved to be false. Then, but not till then. That was his answer, and his last word.

There, as you understand, the heart of the matter indeed rested. In those words lay the whole meaning of the Reformation. Were men to go on for ever saying that this and that was true, because the Pope affirmed it? Or were Popes' decrees thenceforward to be tried like the words of other men — by the ordinary laws of evidence?

It required no great intellect to understand that a Pope's pardon, which you could buy for five shillings, could not really get a soul out of purgatory. It required a quality much rarer than intellect to look such a doctrine in the face — sanctioned as it was by the credulity of ages, and backed by the pomp and pageantry of earthly power — and say to it openly, 'You are a lie.' Cleverness and culture could have given a thousand reasons — they did then and they do now — why an indulgence should be believed in; when honesty and common sense could give but one reason for thinking otherwise. Cleverness and imposture get on excellently well together — imposture and veracity, never.

Luther looked at those wares of Tetzels, and said, 'Your pardons are no pardons at all — no letters of credit on heaven, but flash notes of the Bank of Humbug, and you know it.' They did know it. The conscience of every man in Europe answered back, that what Luther said was true.

Heaven for Sale

Bravery, honesty, veracity, these were the qualities which were needed — which were needed then, and are needed always, as the root of all real greatness in man.

The first missionaries of Christianity, when they came among the heathen nations, and found them worshipping idols, did not care much to reason that an image which man had made could not be God. The priests might have been a match for them in reasoning. They walked up to the idol in the presence of its votaries. They threw stones at it, spat upon it, insulted it. ‘See,’ they said, ‘I do this to your God. If he is God, let him avenge himself.’

It was a simple argument; always effective; easy, and yet most difficult. It required merely a readiness to be killed upon the spot by the superstition which is outraged.

And so, and only so, can truth make its way for us in any such matters. The form changes — the thing remains. Superstition, folly, and cunning will go on to the end of time, spinning their poison webs around the consciences of mankind. Courage and veracity — these qualities, and only these, avail to defeat them.

From the moment that Luther left the emperor’s presence a free man, the spell of Absolutism was broken, and the victory of the Reformation secured. The ban of the Pope had fallen; the secular arm had been called to interfere; the machinery of authority strained as far as it would bear. The emperor himself was an unconscious convert to the higher creed. The Pope had urged him to break his word. The Pope had told him that honor was nothing, and morality was nothing, where the interests of orthodoxy were compromised. The emperor had refused to be tempted into perjury; and, in refusing, had admitted that there

Heaven for Sale

was a spiritual power upon the earth, above the Pope, and above him.

The party of the Church felt it so. A plot was formed to assassinate Luther on his return to Saxony. The insulted majesty of Rome could be vindicated at least by the dagger.

But this, too, failed. The elector heard what was intended. A party of horse, disguised as banditti, waylaid the Reformer upon the road, and carried him off to the castle of Wartburg, where he remained out of harm's way till the general rising of Germany placed him beyond the reach of danger.

At Wartburg for the present evening we leave him.

The Emperor Charles and Luther never met again. The monks of Yuste, who watched on the deathbed of Charles, reported that at the last hour he repented that he had kept his word, and reproached himself for having allowed the arch-heretic to escape from his hands.

It is possible that, when the candle of life was burning low, and spirit and flesh were failing together, and the air of the sick room was thick and close with the presence of the angel of death, the nobler nature of the emperor might have yielded to the influences which were around him. His confessor might have thrust into his lips the words which he so wished to hear.

But Charles the Fifth, though a Catholic always, was a Catholic of the old grand type, to whom creed and dogmas were but the robe of a regal humanity. Another story is told of Charles — an authentic story this one — which makes me think that the monks of Yuste mistook or maligned him. Six and twenty years

Heaven for Sale

after this scene at Worms, when the then dawning heresy had become broad day; when Luther had gone to his rest — and there had gathered about his name the hate which mean men feel for an enemy who has proved too strong for them — a passing vicissitude in the struggle brought the emperor at the head of his army to Wittenberg.

The vengeance which the monks could not inflict upon him in life, they proposed to wreak upon his bones.

The emperor desired to be conducted to Luther's tomb; and as he stood gazing at it, full of many thoughts, someone suggested that the body should be taken up and burnt at the stake in the Market Place.

There was nothing unusual in the proposal; it was the common practice of the Catholic Church with the remains of heretics who were held unworthy to be left in repose in hallowed ground. There was scarcely, perhaps, another Catholic prince who would have hesitated to comply. But Charles was one of nature's gentlemen; he answered, 'I war not with the dead.'

Erasmus, Desiderius. *Delphi Collected Works of Desiderius Erasmus (Illustrated)* (Delphi Series Nine Book 12) (Kindle Locations 32821-32825). Delphi Classics. Kindle Edition.

Martin Luther's Revolt: A Psychological Examination

By Reverend Peter M.J. Stravinskis

Editor of the The Catholic Response. Author of over 500 articles for numerous Catholic publications, as well as several books, including "The Catholic Church and the Bible and Understanding the Sacraments."

Introduction

2017 marks the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of his 95 Theses on the doors of the collegiate church of Wittenberg, traditionally regarded as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

It has been a cause of some concern and consternation for many Catholics to have learned that there will be Catholic (even papal) participation in various events connected to this anniversary. What could be celebrated? The break-up of Catholic unity? The demise of Christendom? The impetus for rationalism and secularism? To commemorate, perhaps, but surely not to celebrate. Even many serious Protestant clergy and theologians have insisted that one must not celebrate something that brought on such dire (and probably undesired, unforeseen) consequences. To commemorate would necessarily mean studying the causes and the unfolding of events – learning from the errors and repenting of the sins of any and all that rent the seamless garment of Christ. This is no more and no less than what the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council urged and what St. John Paul II often referred to as “the healing

Heaven for Sale

of memories.” which means genuine honesty. That honesty was carried on in spades at the Council of Trent and in the Counter-Reformation, both of which admitted that true problems had crept into the Church and needed correction.

Since Luther is such a pivotal character in the drama of the sixteenth century, it behooves all to put him under the microscope for closer observation. To be sure, Luther was a brilliant theologian. He was also deeply imbued with the understanding of the absolute holiness of God, the centrality of Christ in the work of our salvation, and the concomitant need for the Church to be the spotless Bride of the Redeemer which St. Paul calls her.

All that said, Luther was also a vicious anti-Semite; one given to exaggeration and extremes, taking no prisoners; a crude man whose language would be constantly “bleeped” even on modern television. The ex-nun whom he took as a wife he treated with arrogance and disdain. His apparent inability to be faithful to his vow of chastity drove him to near-despair. To say that he was a conflicted individual is to succumb to understatement (as late as 1521, he was still willing to admit the necessity of the Petrine office in the Church). Even the most ardent supporter of the Reformation would never accuse Luther of being a model of Christian holiness.

So much of the negative side of the ledger must be attributed to “personality” difficulties of the leader of the revolt against ecclesiastical authority. As a seminarian over four decades ago, in March 1971, I wrote a paper on Luther’s *psychological* incapacity to accept the papacy. It discusses Luther’s relationship with the papacy and attempts to understand his negative reaction to papal authority in the light of his psychological deficiencies, stemming from early childhood and

youth. After considerations of youthful fear, depression and despair we shall see how these events led up to the break with Rome and indeed, that the break was inevitable.

A harsh childhood

It is no deep secret or information privy to the most proficient psychologist that the first world experienced by the newborn infant is the most important world in which he will ever live since this microcosm of society symbolizes all of society to him. The family life into which young Martin was born was none too happy. Old Hans Luther was a hard-working miner and expected the same attitudes and values in his children. The normal parental disappointment when established goals for children are not attained went beyond normal proportions since Martin could remember serious disagreements leading to weeks of non-communication. Severe beatings were daily fare for Martin at the hands of both father and mother.

Young Martin had an acute memory and later in life commented, "My father once whipped me so severely that I fled from him and it was hard for him to win me back.... My mother once beat me until the blood flowed for having stolen a miserable nut. It was this strict discipline which finally forced me into the monastery." From this single statement we can gain several insights. A great deal of harshness and pettiness is revealed in this "microcosm" previously mentioned. The incipient stages of resentment, fear and anxiety in the face of authority are evident here as well.

Since we attribute the role of fatherhood to the First Person of the Trinity, Luther found himself incapable of approaching the Father. In addition to this problem, "God the Father and Jesus were represented to him as stern, nay, cruel judges, to appease

Heaven for Sale

whose wrath the intercession of the saints must be secured.” We now see the transfer of the poor “father image” to God Himself, which would have serious theological repercussions throughout Luther’s life.

In school he was struck by the brutality of the teachers with their frequent floggings. He stubbornly refused to converse in Latin and incurred the wrath of his professors. He compared his Latin examination to a “trial for murder.” Therefore, the final authority faced by any child also affected him adversely. Erikson makes a rather salient point in asserting that “the disciplinary climate of home and school and the religious climate of the community and Church were more oppressive [to him] than inspiring.”

Luther’s later youth was greatly plagued by “tristitia” which followed him for life. Despite an apparent inability for father and son to get along, Martin never ceased to try to please his father — so much so that he intended to study law for his father’s sake. Nevertheless, the “Saul episode” in his life on the way to Erfurt made him vow himself to monasticism if he survived. He kept his promise and entered the Augustinian monks, a very educated, dedicated community at that time. When Martin announced his decision, “Old Hans Luther was bitterly opposed to his son’s step, which he believed destroyed all chance of a successful career.” Once again, the father-son tensions were aroused.

Luther the monk

In the monastery, Luther began by performing the most menial of tasks but soon his talents were discovered by Staupitz, the Prior, who offered him several opportunities to exercise his intellectual abilities. His earliest influences were the Bible, Augustine and Occam. The influence of Occam is especially

Heaven for Sale

important for he was one of the sharpest critics of the medieval Church, and his frankness doubtlessly eased the burden on Luther when he followed in his footsteps.

Although he sought spiritual comfort in the monastery, he confesses: “I was often terrified at the name of Jesus. The sight of a crucifix was like lightning to me and when his name was spoken I would rather have heard that of the devil. I had lost my faith and could not suppose that God was other than angry.” His constant attempts at absolute perfection and daily confessions (even more frequently on occasions) all give evidence of a very unbalanced spirituality which led him to doubt and even despair of his faith and ultimate salvation. His First Mass also was tainted with torment and dread as he haltingly uttered the words of Consecration. His father, though consenting to come, did his damage with his comment after Mass by reminding Martin of the saying used to arouse the sensibilities of the clergy, “Panis es et panis manebis!” (“Bread thou art, and bread thou shalt remain!). Martin related later in life that at that moment he felt like murdering his father.

Despite his apparent problems of faith, he rose to great prominence in his Order and in the academic world. His preaching became the object of adulation for the simple and educated alike and “in both sermons and lectures many a trenchant word against spiritual wickedness in high places remind one that the monk was already a reformer.”

Sent on a journey to Rome, the young monk went through all the motions of a faithful pilgrim to the “Eternal City,” yet doubting their efficacy all the while. Shock at the highly immoral life of the Italian priests, their hurried Masses, legalism and double standards makes him comment as he

Heaven for Sale

reminisces on the trip, “No one can imagine what sins and infamous actions are committed in Rome; they must be seen and heard to be believed. Thus, they are in the habit of saying, ‘If their be a hell, Rome is built over it; ‘ it is an abyss whence issues every kind of sin.”

On his return to Germany, the scandal of Rome fresh in his mind, he opposed the infamous peddler of indulgences, Tetzl. He openly challenged the theory of indulgences and especially the way in which they were being preached. Interestingly enough, Todd notes that he appealed to authority to back his protestations, asserting that he criticized “in obedience to my duty and the burden resting on me, moreover, by virtue of papal authority I hold a public teaching office. Accordingly, it is one of my official duties to strike out against all the wrong of which I become aware, even if the wrong is done by persons in high position.” Here we see Luther vacillating between attacking authority and relying on authority for his power to do so, which is again a throw-back to his “cat and mouse” games with his father.

Unrest and rebellion

As the issue progressed and the debates continued, Luther further developed his concepts along the lines of “personal faith, personal humiliation, salvation and justification.” The emphasis was, of course, on ‘personal’ — a word which became an obsession with the man who had to do everything for himself. In this context it is easy to see his stress on “sola Scriptura” for he espoused a *personal* interpretation of Scripture. Another strong emphasis was placed on the acceptance of Jesus as *personal* Savior. A gross insecurity becomes evident.

Heaven for Sale

At the outset of his rebellion, Luther had genuine misgivings about his right to challenge established norms and doctrine. In his struggle, “Martin Luther repeatedly affirmed the frequency of the temptation. Satan often said to me: What if your dogma is false whereby you thus overthrow the Pope, the Mass and the monks? And thus, he often took me by surprise that the sweat poured out of me He once troubled me with Paul to Timothy and simply strangled me so that my heart felt like melting in the body....” It is well to note how he so sought to reassure himself of the righteousness of his cause that he says Satan tempted him to maintain traditional doctrine. Todd asserts “there was a big element of physical tension — also of spiritual horror as he moved further away from the established traditions”and, in fact, so grave were his doubts during this period that he confesses he was almost driven to suicide on occasion.

As already mentioned, Luther disdained any source of authority, save Scripture, but O’Hare suggests one exception: “He would have none of them (the Fathers) or their teachings, except when some fellow-rebel against Divine authority was in collision with him or when he had to appeal to some authority beyond himself, to refute an adversary.” At no stage were his concepts clearly crystallized, and it would seem that O’Hare’s observations are well-founded: “Ever vacillating, ambiguous, contradictory, he was utterly incapable of formulating a clear, well-defined, unhesitating system of belief to replace that of the old divinely established Church.” From previous discussion of Luther’s personality and psychological state, these inconsistencies should not be surprising for he was a man struggling between revolting against authority and setting himself up as an authority, a *Gottgeistig* (a spiritual or intellectual god). This period in Luther’s life and the one

immediately subsequent to it were characterized by manic productivity and severe breakdown and hence we see why “Reiter considers the years when Luther was 22-30 as one long *Krankheitsphase*, one drawn-out state of nervous disease, which extended to the thirty-sixth year.”

Hostility toward Church authority

As the lines of demarcation became more formally fixed and solidified and entrenched, Luther became more open in his hostility to the Pope and the authority and power which he wielded. “With almost every step that Rome or other ecclesiastical authority took, in an attempt to silence, condemn or compromise with Luther, Luther took another step in the development of his theological critique, proposing even more drastic modifications of the ecclesiastical institutions.” The truth of this statement becomes obvious when for hundreds of years the theory was “ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia” (where Peter is, there is the Church) and then Luther says, “Where the Word of God is preached and believed, there is the Church.” Smith gives Luther’s position on Rome as follows: “The assertion that the Roman Church is superior to all other Churches is proved only by weak papal decrees of the last 400 years against which militate the accredited history of 1100 years, the Bible and the decrees of the Nicean Council, the holiest of all councils.” Certain questions can be raised here: Why are the papal decrees referred to as “weak”? How is the primacy of Rome definitively contradicted by Scripture? Why is Nicea to be regarded as “the holiest of all councils”? The answer would seem to lie in the fact that Luther thought in that way and for him it had to be true for, while professing to be open to theological debate, he “anathematized everyone whose belief differed from his own.”

Heaven for Sale

Finally, after refusing to appear in Rome to plead his case, he agreed to receive and discuss his position with Cajetan, the papal legate who proved to be an unfortunate choice for several reasons. Cajetan was an Italian, and Luther was extremely nationalistic and vehemently anti-Italian. Cajetan was a cardinal, and this position smacked of the establishment which Luther wished to dissolve. He was the Cardinal Protector of the Dominicans, and one need only recall that the entire incident began with the Dominican Tetzl. Cajetan was a confirmed Thomist which gave them little common ground — even philosophically speaking, prescinding from theological positions. Most of all, he was the representative of the Pope, the “Holy Father,” again reminding Luther of his earthly father whom he hated and his heavenly Father whom he feared exceedingly.

Perhaps the most ill-chosen words Cajetan ever uttered were those which promised Luther a “fatherly hearing.” “The psychological implications of the meeting are important. Insofar as Luther did have a ‘thing’ about his father, and then about God and found himself often both revolting against and trying to appease authority, then his clash with the Roman Curia was likely to provide a concrete occasion for him to fight back, with a feeling of justification at authority. The meeting with Cajetan would be symbolical. It does not seem very fanciful to see that Luther found here a father figure in reverse, a figure whom he found good reason to oppose.”

In the discussion which lasted hours, Luther’s main points against the papacy may be summarized thus:

- The Church does not need a Pope;
- A visible head is inconsistent with the nature of the Church;

Heaven for Sale

- A definite place (Rome) is inconsistent with the character of a spiritual kingdom;
- The power of the keys has been given to all Christians;
- The Pope has no jurisdiction over matters of sin, grace and indulgences.

In all these arguments a fear of the necessity of a mediator (e.g., the Church, the Pope) is apparent and the need for him to work out his own salvation independent of the Church is obvious. Salvation, for him, was a matter of the individual and Jesus, with no need for the community of the Church — only personal faith. Here, more acutely than elsewhere, can be sensed Luther's great urgency to attack the papacy at its very roots. Questioning the genuine interest of the Pope, fearing his wrath and despising his power were brought on by the transfer of image: from father (earthly authority) to God (divine authority and justice) to the Pope (the combination of both).

Excommunication

Eventually, the threat of excommunication came in the bull, "Exsurge, Domine," which Luther promptly burned along with the books of Canon Law. "Chagrined and wounded in his vanity, he grew litigious, vengeful and abusive," as witnessed by his statement: "...Know that I, with all who worship Christ, consider the See of Rome to be occupied by Satan and to be the throne of Anti-Christ, and that I will no longer obey nor remain united to him, the chief and deadly enemy of Christ."

His most searing attacks on the papacy came in his work, "Wider das Papstum in Rom von Teufel gestftet" in which "Le Pape y est dénommé non 'très saint' suivant l'usage, mais 'très infernal.' La papauté s'est toujours montrée assoiffée de sang.

Heaven for Sale

Le livre est directement adressé à ‘l’âne pontifical.’” (“The Pope is there spoken of not as ‘very holy’ according to common usage, but as ‘very infernal.’ The papacy is always shown dripping in blood. The book is directly addressed to “the pontifical ass.”). In this book were also found the crudest sketches and maxims on the papacy and one must agree with O’Hare that “for one who claimed that his mouth was the mouth of Jesus Christ,’ we are astonished at the vocabulary of insult and rancorous hate.”

The die had been cast. The Diet, final excommunication, the formal establishment of Lutheranism and his marriage all follow from the events discussed and are a matter of historical fact, not psychological speculation.

As indicated at the start, the goal of this essay was to demonstrate how Luther, as a result of various psychological influences, revolted from papal authority. The bulk of the blame has been placed on the shoulders of his father, for “a most pathological relationship” is evident here. Several of the key moves in Luther’s life were made as a rebellious answer to the authority he encountered at the time, the most notable being his decisions to enter the monastery over paternal objection and to found his own church over the protestations and threats of recognized ecclesiastical authority and Tradition.

At the end of his life, we see Luther as an unhappy, broken man and Erickson’s theory deserves some consideration: “It is not surprising that the period of deepest despair emerged when he becomes so much of what his father wanted him to be.” From a most radical, rebellious youth, in old age a sign of passive resignation leaves the foreground and sinks into the background espousing a philosophy of patient acceptance

Heaven for Sale

which, if practiced earlier in life, would have completely altered the course of history for Western Christendom: “Il faut que j’aie de la patience avec le pape, avec mes disciples, avec mes domestiques, avec mes femmes, toute ma vie n’est que patience” (“I must be patient with the Pope, with my followers, with my household, with my women; my whole life is nothing but patience.”).

And so, the severity encountered by the young Martin in the person of his father had such far-reaching effects that it made him sickly and anxious as a boy, sad as a youth, scrupulous to a fault in the monastery, resentful of authority in his prime and beset with doubts, depression and despair in the dusk of life. Perhaps most indicative of the man’s agonizing search for absolute truth and yet lack of certainty is what is often given as his closing statement at the Diet of Worms: “Hier ich stehe. Ich kann nicht anders.” (“Here I stand. I can do no other.”) But he quickly adds, “Gott helf mich.” (“God help me.”).

Several of Luthers Letters Regarding the Indulgence Issue

We offer several of Luther's consecutive letters here to focus on his personal feelings about the issue of Indulgences. The first was to John Lange, a fellow Augustinian and early follower of Luther. Lang was pastor of Erfort until his death in 1548. In it, Luther having started the fire, bemoans his acolytes burning Tetzel's indulgences, complains of his opponents raging against him and attempts to absolve himself of any guilt

TO JOHN LANGE

March 21, 1518.

The vendors of Indulgences are thundering at me from the pulpit, so that their stock of insulting epithets is exhausted. They tell the people that I shall be burned in fourteen days – another makes it a month. They are also issuing counter-propositions, so that I fear ere long they will burst with fury. I am advised not to go to Heidelberg, so that they may not accomplish through deceit and wiles what they are unable to achieve through force. But I shall render obedience, and come on foot, and, if God will, pass through Erfurt; but do not wait for me, for I shall scarcely be able to start till the Wednesday after Quasimodo.

Our Prince, who devotes much time to the study of this theology, and loves it, is a warm protector of Carlstadt and me, and will not permit me to be lured to Rome.

Heaven for Sale

They know this, and are furious at it. So that you may not have an exaggerated account of the burning of Tetzels theses, I shall tell you the facts. The students, who are heartily sick of sophistical teaching and longing for the sacred Scriptures, are most favorable to me. Having heard that Tetzels, the originator of them, had sent a man from Halle, they immediately went and asked how he dared bring such things here. Some bought a few, while others robbed him of several, and burned the rest – about eight hundred copies – after proclaiming that the burning and funeral of Tetzels answer to them would take place at the Market at two o'clock. And all this was done without the knowledge of the Prince, the Town Council, or any of us. We all think it very bad of our people treating the man so. I am innocent, but feel certain I get all the blame. It has caused much talk, especially among Tetzels followers, who are naturally very angry. I do not know how it will all end, only it has placed me in a more perilous position.

Martin Luther.

Wittenberg.

Heaven for Sale

TO JOHANN VON STAUPITZ

In this letter, to Johann von Staupitz, his Superior in the Augustinian Order, Luther discusses theology.

March 31, 1518.

My greeting! Although overwhelmed by business, I feel constrained briefly to address my father in the Lord.

To begin with, I am quite willing to admit that my name is in bad odor with very many. For these good folks assert that I despise psalters and other forms of prayer, nay, even good works themselves. But St. Paul himself was often treated in the same way, some accusing him of saying, “Let us do evil, that good may come.”

But I have kept firm to Tauler’s theology and that other treatise which you had printed through our Aurifaber. I teach that man must trust solely in Christ Jesus – neither in prayer, merit, nor works, but hope for blessedness only through God’s mercy.

It is from this that these people extract poison and disseminate it everywhere, as you see. Only as it was neither good nor bad report which made me act so, therefore I take no notice of all this, although it is those things which bring down the hatred of the schoolmen about my neck.

Because I prefer the mystical writings and the Bible to them, their wrath and jealousy are unbounded. I do not read the scholastics blindfolded, as they do, but ponder them. The

Heaven for Sale

apostle told us to prove all things, and hold to that which is good. I do not despise all theirs, neither consider it all good. But these creatures generally kindle a fire out of a spark, and make an elephant out of a flea. When it was permitted to a Thomas to stand out against the whole world, and a Scotus, Gabriel, and others to contradict him, and when, even among the scholastics, there are as many sects as there are heads, or rather every single head daily builds up a new system of divinity, why should I not have the same liberty? But when God lifts up His hand no one can stay it, and when He rests no one can arouse Him.

Farewell, and pray for me, and for the cause of divine truth wherever it may be hidden.

Martin Luther.
Wittenberg.

Heaven for Sale

In this, his famous letter to Pope Leo X in Rome, Luther writes submissively to the Pope, in whose justice and love of truth he seems to have implicit confidence. In reality he despised him, though he dare not let on in this missive.

TO POPE LEO X.

May 30, 1518.

Martin Luther, Augustinian monk, desires everlasting salvation to the Most Holy Father, Leo X.

I know, most holy father, that evil reports are being spread about me, some friends having vilified me to your Holiness, as if I were trying to belittle the power of the Keys and of the Supreme Pontiff, therefore I am being accused of being a heretic, a renegade, and a thousand other ill names are being hurled at me, enough to make my ears tingle and my eyes start in my head, but my one source of confidence is an innocent conscience. But all this is nothing new, for I am decorated with such marks of distinction in our own land, by those honorable and straightforward people who are themselves afflicted with the worst of consciences. But, most holy father, I must hasten to the point, hoping your Holiness will graciously listen to me, for I am as awkward as a child.

Some time ago the preaching of the apostolic jubilee of the Indulgences was begun, and soon made such headway that these preachers thought they could say what they wished, under the shelter of your Holiness's name, alarming the people at such malicious, heretical lies being proclaimed to the derision of the spiritual powers. And, not satisfied with pouring out their venom, they have disseminated the little book in which their malicious lies are confirmed, binding the father confessors by oath to inculcate those lies upon their people. I shall not enlarge

Heaven for Sale

upon the disgraceful greed, which call never be satisfied, with which every syllable of this tiny book reeks. This is true, and no one can shut his eyes to the scandal, for it is manifest in the book. And they continue to lead the people captive with their vain consolation, plucking, as the prophet Micah says, “their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones,” while they wallow in abundance themselves. They use your Holiness’s name to allay the uproar they cause, and threaten them with fire and sword, and the ignominy of being called heretics; nay, one can scarcely believe the wiles they use to cause confusion among the people. Complaints are universal as to the greed of the priests, while the power of the Keys and the Pope is being evil spoken of in Germany. And when I heard of such things I burned with zeal for the honor of Christ, or, if some will have it so, the young blood within me boiled; and yet I felt it did not behoove me to do anything in the matter except to draw the attention of some prelates to the abuses. Some acted upon the hint, but others derided it, and interpreted it in various ways. For the dread of your Holiness’s name, and the threat of being placed under the ban, was all-powerful. At length I thought it best not to be harsh, but oppose them by throwing doubts upon their doctrines, preparatory to a disputation upon them. So I threw down the gauntlet to the learned by issuing my theses, and asking them to discuss them, either by word of mouth, or in writing, which is a well-known fact.

From this, most holy father, has such a fire been kindled, that, to judge from the hue and cry, one would think the whole world had been set ablaze.

And perhaps this is because I, through your Holiness’s apostolic authority, am a doctor of theology, and they do not wish to admit that I am entitled, according to the usage of all universities in Christendom, openly to discuss, not only

Heaven for Sale

Indulgences, but many higher doctrines, such as Divine Power, Forgiveness, and Mercy

Now, what shall I do? I cannot retract, and I see what jealousy and hatred I have roused through the explanation of my theses. Besides, I am most unwilling to leave my corner only to hear harsh judgments against myself, but also because I am a stupid dunderhead in this learned age, and too ignorant to deal with such weighty matters. For, in these golden times, when the number of the learned is daily increasing, and arts and sciences are flourishing, not to speak of the Greek and Hebrew tongues, so that even a Cicero were he now alive would creep into a corner, although he never feared light and publicity, sheer necessity alone drives me to cackle as a goose among swans.

So, to reconcile my opponents if possible, and satisfy the expectations of many, I let in the light of day upon my thoughts, which you can see in my explanation of my propositions on Indulgences.

I made them public that I might have the protection of your Holiness's name, and find refuge beneath the shadow of your wings. So all may see from this how I esteem the spiritual power, and honor the dignity of the Keys. For, if I were such as they say, and had not held a public discussion on the subject, which every doctor is entitled to do, then assuredly his Serene Highness Frederick, Elector of Saxony, who is an ardent lover of Christian and apostolic truth, would not have suffered such a dangerous person in his University of Wittenberg.

And also, the beloved and learned doctors and magisters of our University, who cleave firmly to our religion, would certainly have expelled me from their midst. And is it not strange that my enemies not only try to convict me of sin and put me to shame, but also the Elector, and the whole University? Therefore, most holy father, I prostrate myself at your feet, placing myself and all I am and have at your disposal, to be

Heaven for Sale

dealt with as you see fit. My cause hangs on the will of your Holiness, by whose verdict I shall either save or lose my life. Come what may, I shall recognize the voice of your Holiness to be that of Christ, speaking through you. If I merit death, I do not refuse to die, for “the earth is the Lord’s,” and all that is therein, to whom be praise to all eternity! Amen. May He preserve your Holiness to life eternal.

Martin Luther, Augustinian

For further reading...

<http://renovabis.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Confession-Bklet.pdf>

“The Church sold indulgences and ecclesiastical offices. These abuses led to the Protestant Reformation.”

By Steve Weidenkopf,

Author of “The Real Story of Catholic History: Answering Twenty Centuries of Anti-Catholic Myths” (Kindle Locations 2612-2617). Catholic Answers Press. Kindle Edition.

The standard narrative about the Protestant Reformation includes the assertion that the corrupt Catholic Church sold indulgences and practiced *simony*, the buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices. These abuses, goes the narrative, prompted Martin Luther in righteous zeal to promulgate his Ninety-Five Theses and launch the reform of the Church, which the pope and Catholic bishops rejected, thus leading to the cleaving of Christendom.

As a general principle, it is best to view historical events through the eyes of the people who lived through them rather than backward from our present-day perspective. One must also recall the distinction between official Catholic teachings and how those teachings may be misapplied by the Church’s sinful (yet redeemed) members. Abuses of Church teachings do not invalidate the teachings themselves.

By the eleventh century, it was widely acknowledged that the Church was in need of serious reform. The papacy had long suffered from interference by secular rulers, which at times resulted in a less than ideal candidate on the Chair of Peter. The

Heaven for Sale

discipline of celibacy was often flouted, and simony was prevalent as well. Reforms were initiated by a series of eleventh-century popes who had been holy monks, including Pope St. Leo IX (r. 1049– 1054), Pope St. Gregory VII (r. 1073– 1085) and Bl. Urban II (r. 1088– 1099). These men set out to free the Church from the interference of secular rulers, to end the abuse of simony, and to enforce clerical celibacy. Another focus was papal finances, which were highly unstable, since the bulk of revenue came from the Papal States, which secular rulers could (and sometimes did) invade and occupy. To provide an independent revenue stream, the reforming popes instituted fees for various papal honors, privileges, and exemptions. Monasteries and churches under papal protection paid a census tax, and papal fiefs paid taxes as well. 284 Unfortunately, these fees and taxes would eventually lead to the kinds of abuses they were intended to eradicate.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were difficult times for the Church. 285 The papacy was in the hands of the so-called Renaissance popes, who viewed themselves more as secular princes than as shepherds of the universal Church. There was no doubt that the Church was, once again, in need of serious reform, to combat the abuses of simony, nepotism, absenteeism (when a bishop does not live in his diocese), pluralism (one man as bishop of multiple dioceses), and violations of celibacy. Various attempts were made to root out these abuses, which were a particular concern of the Fifth Lateran Ecumenical Council, convened in 1512 by Pope Julius II (r. 1503– 1513). However, the centuries of heavy papal taxes and fees had taken their toll, especially in German territories, where rising nationalism, animosity toward Rome, and a decentralized political structure created the conditions for the cleaving of Christendom in the Protestant Reformation.

Heaven for Sale

The doctrine of indulgences was the theological flash point for the eruption of Martin Luther into public consciousness. Indulgences are often misleadingly described as granting to faithful Catholics “the remission of sins.” More accurately, indulgences are “the remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.” Catholics can receive an indulgence when “duly disposed” and “under certain prescribed conditions through the actions of the Church.” The Church is able to grant indulgences because it is “the minister of redemption” and, with the authority given it by Christ, it “dispenses and applies . . . the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints” to the faithful (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1471). Sin is a freely willed offense against God and neighbor. God forgives the guilt of sin through the sacrament of penance. But justice demands reparation—that is, temporal punishment—for the harm caused by sin. By virtue of the authority given to it by Christ, then, the Church may assign penitential acts that will lessen (indulge) or completely erase the temporal punishment for sins.

The granting of indulgences was not new at the time of Luther; it can be traced to the early Church during the Roman persecutions. At that time, absolution for confessed sins was not given until the completion of the penance. The penances assigned were often difficult and lengthy, so penitents began asking those Christians who were imprisoned for the Faith to offer up their sufferings in atonement for the penitent’s sins. Eventually, the Church recognized the validity of these vicarious acts of atonement and granted absolution to the penitents on whose behalf they were made. During the eighth to tenth centuries, bishops allowed penances assigned in the sacrament of confession, which were often severe, to be

Heaven for Sale

substituted for other penitential works, such as visiting a certain church or saint's shrine, which would usually be accounted as substitution for a number of days of penance. In the eleventh century, popes granted indulgences for fighting in defense of the Faith. Leo IX, for instance, gave an indulgence to German warriors fighting in the papal army against the invading Normans; and Alexander II (r. 1061– 1073) granted an indulgence to warriors who fought the Muslims in the Reconquista of Spain.

It was Gregory VII who developed the theological basis for the granting of indulgences to warriors. He postulated that there were two purposes for fighting in wars: secular and penitential. Secular purposes included revenge and the acquisition of territory. Penitential purposes included the defense of territory, the restoration of property, and the protection of the weak. Gregory asserted that warriors could receive indulgences if their motivations for fighting were truly selfless and informed by their faith. Pope Bl. Urban II, who called the First Crusade in 1095, solidified the theological basis of granting indulgences to warriors. Urban wrote: "whoever for devotion alone, not to gain honor or money, goes to Jerusalem to liberate the Church of God can substitute this journey for all penance." Later, Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294– 1303) offered a plenary indulgence to all pilgrims who, being truly contrite and having confessed their sins, visited the basilicas of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rome during the Great Jubilee of 1300.

Although Church teaching on indulgences was theologically well-justified, it did not prevent abuses of the practice. Hence, in 747 the local council of Clovesho in England found it necessary to condemn the practice of mercenaries performing someone else's penances for a fee. Likewise, Pope Boniface IX

Heaven for Sale

(r. 1389– 1404) and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401– 1464), the apostolic legate in Germany, condemned preachers who claimed they had the authority to forgive sins for money. Yet another potential abuse was the granting of indulgences for contributing to the cost of building a public utility (such as a bridge or church). Although this practice predated the sixteenth century, it was the rebuilding of St. Peter's basilica in Rome under Pope Leo X that raised Luther's ire. 288 The potential for abuse was rife, as bishops were allowed to keep a percentage of all alms collected in their dioceses for such purposes. The situation gave rise to itinerant indulgence preachers, many of them Dominicans, who would enter a diocese, preach sermons on various topics, and then exhort the faithful to go to confession and request an indulgence for the giving of alms. Some of these preachers undoubtedly crossed the line and preyed on the ignorance of the faithful in order to get more money.

A Dominican named Johann Tetzel was one such preacher, and his activities in Luther's home diocese spurred the monk-professor to write his Ninety-Five Theses. Tetzel gave the impression in his preaching that indulgences for almsgiving could free a soul from purgatory, which was not Church teaching. Although he probably never uttered the words attributed to him, "As soon as the coin in the box clinks, the soul out of purgatory's fire springs," they accurately convey the general theme of his preaching. 289 In any case, Luther was not condemned for questioning the granting of indulgences for contributions to the rebuilding of St. Peter's; he was condemned because he called into question the authority of the pope to even grant any indulgence at all. Luther's questioning of the pope's authority is what triggered his eventual condemnation and excommunication.

Heaven for Sale

The fact is the Church is always in need of reform. Throughout its history, there has been abuses of one kind or another, such as *simony*. Although there was nothing wrong in principle with the granting of indulgences for the giving of alms, some less than scrupulous preachers misled the faithful into thinking they were receiving a “get out of Purgatory” card for themselves or a loved one. But Martin Luther was not condemned for (among other reasons) criticizing unscrupulous indulgence preachers; he was condemned because he denied the authority of the pope to grant indulgences at all, which was heretical.

For further information on the history of the Sacrament of Penance, click the link below.

<http://renovabis.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Confession-Bklet.pdf>



The Altar of St. Peter's Basilica, Roma, making the site of the ossuary of St. Peter.