

The Catholic Church & Indulgences

Central Historical Question:

If there is no way someone can prove the Catholic Church's use of indulgences did not work, did people then or do we now have the right to debate over their use?

Indulgences

- ▶ An indulgence was forgiveness for a person who confessed a sin, and showed remorse.
- ▶ Popes authorized giving Indulgences away to those who agreed to perform some act of charity, almsgiving, prayer, pilgrimage, or other pious work
- ▶ In 1515 the Church (and the pope) offered indulgences to those who gave alms (\$) for this pious work.

Indulgences

- ▶ Some of the preachers selling these indulgences told people a “purchase” of this indulgence would give them, or even the dead, a secure place in heaven.
- ▶ Many people were angered with the Catholic Church’s method of using indulgences to pay for the rebuilding of St Peter’s church in Rome.

Johann Tetzel

The famous seller of indulgences



Illustration of German Dominican preacher Johann Tetzel (circa 1465 – 1519) selling indulgences inside a church. (Credit: Kees Collection/Getty Images)

Document #1 Sermons of the Catholic Friar Johann Tetzel 1515

Listen now, God and Peter call you. You priest, you noble, you merchant, you virgin, you matron, you youth, you old man, consider the salvation of your souls and those of your loved ones departed. Have you considered that you do not know whether you can reach heaven? Consider that those who are apologetic and have confessed and made contribution will receive complete forgiveness of all their sins.

Document #1 Sermons of the Catholic Friar Johann Tetzel 1515 continued

Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends beseeching you, saying, "We are in horrible torture from which you can save us for a small cost." Are you so cruel and hard that now you are not willing for so little to set us free? Will you let us lie here in the flames?"



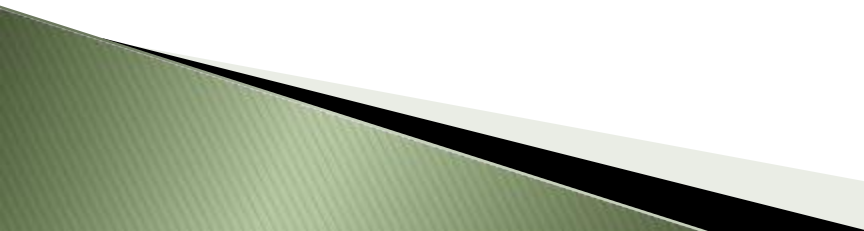
<http://www.godecookery.com/macabre/gallery5/macbr148.htm>

Document #1 Sermons of the Catholic Friar Johann Tetzel 1515 continued

Remember that you are able to release them, for *as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs*. Will you not then for a quarter of a florin receive these letters of indulgence through which you are able to lead a divine and mortal soul into the fatherland of paradise?

Document #1 Sermons of the Catholic Friar Johann Tetzel 1515 continued

Know that the life of man upon earth is a constant struggle. Both other men and the Devil are always trying to destroy our souls. We are even born sinners. Alas! How impossible it is to reach the gate of salvation without divine aid!



Document #1 Sermons of the Catholic Friar Johann Tetzel 1515 continued

Do you know anyone going to Rome, or undertaking dangerous journeys, uses a broker to ensure his safe passage? Are you not willing, then, to pay for these indulgences, to help your soul go safe and sound into the land of Paradise?

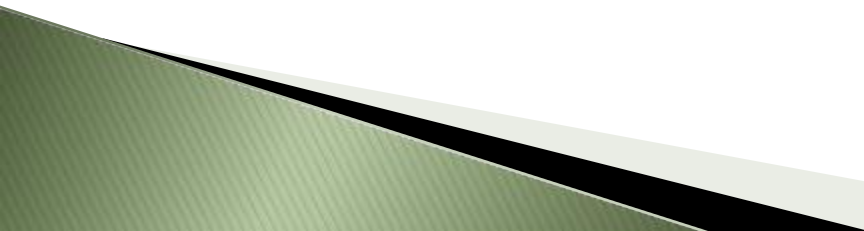
Document #2 Official statements from the Council of Trent– 1563

In order to maintain control of Christian doctrine, the Catholic Church decrees no one shall presume to interpret Christian doctrine contrary to what has been said by the holy mother Church. It is the church's position to interpret Holy Scriptures. Those who break these laws shall be punished with the penalties by law established.

Document #2 Official statements from the Council of Trent– 1563 continued

DECREE CONCERNING INDULGENCES

The power of conferring Indulgences was granted by Christ to the Church. Christians benefit from the use of Indulgences by the Church. The Church condemns with those who either claim Indulgences are useless; or who deny that the Church the power of granting them.



Document #2 Official statements from the Council of Trent– 1563 continued

In granting them, however, moderation must be observed; The abuses which have caused Indulgences to be the target of blaspheming heretics must be amended and corrected, and all evil gains for the obtaining thereof,–be wholly abolished.

Document #2 Official statements from the Council of Trent– 1563 continued

As for the other abuses which have developed from superstition, ignorance and disrespect, the Church commands all bishops to report all abuses of this nature.

Thus the gift of holy Indulgences may be Dispensed to all the faithful, piously, holily, and incorruptly by the Catholic Church and the Roman Pope.

Amen.



So back to the:

Central Historical Question:

If there is no way someone can prove the Catholic Church's use of indulgences did not work, did people then or do we now have the right to debate over their use?