

The Reformation, Primary Sources:

A description of Johann Tetzel, by Friedrich Myconius

At the time a Dominican monk named Johann Tetzel was the great mouthpiece, commissioner, and preacher of indulgences in Germany. His preaching raised enormous amounts of money which were sent to Rome. This was particularly the case in the new mining town St. Annaberg, where I, Friedrich Myconius, listened to him for over two years. The claims of this uneducated and shameful monk were unbelievable. Thus he said that even if someone had slept with Christ's dear Mother, the Pope had power in heaven and on earth to forgive as long as the money was put into the indulgences coffer. And if the Pope would forgive, God also had to forgive. He furthermore said if they would put money quickly into the coffer to obtain grace and indulgence, all the mountains near St. Annaberg would turn into pure silver. He claimed that in the very moment the coin rang in the coffer, the soul rose up to heaven. Such a marvellous thing was his indulgence. In sum and substance: God was no longer God, as he had bestowed all divine power to the Pope: *'Tu es Petrus, tibi dabo claves, quodcunque.'* And then there were the masters of the Inquisition, who banished and burned those saying conflicting words.

This indulgence was highly respected. When the commissioner was welcomed to town, the papal bull was carried on velvet or gold cloth. All the priests, monks, councilmen, teachers, pupils, men, women, maids, and children went to meet him singing in solemn procession with flags and candles. The bells tolled and when he entered the church the organ played. A red Cross was put up in the middle of the church to which the Pope's banner was affixed. In short: even God himself could not have been welcomed and received more beautifully.

Source: Friedrich Myconius, *Historia reformationis*, p. 14.

Document B: Sermon on Indulgences, Johann Tetzel (1517)

You may obtain safe conduct from the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ [the Pope] by which means 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. 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 nearly numberless, and those that commit them must suffer endless punishment in the burning pains of Purgatory.

Document C: Description of Incident Involving Tetzel, by Luther.

After Tetzel had received a substantial amount of money at Leipzig, a nobleman asked him if it were possible to receive a letter of indulgence for a future sin. Tetzel quickly answered in the affirmative, insisting, however, that the payment had to be made at once. This the nobleman did, receiving thereupon letter and seal from Tetzel. When Tetzel left Leipzig the nobleman attacked him along the way, gave him a thorough beating, and sent him back empty-handed to Leipzig with the comment that this was the future sin which he had in mind. Duke George at first was quite furious about this incident, but when he heard the whole story he let it go without punishing the nobleman.

Source: *Luthers Schriften*, herausg. von Walch. XV, 446.
