

Explanation of the Ninety-five Theses

LW 31:79-252

Introduction

Luther's detailed *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses* is one of the most important documents written during his formative years, for it was written and revised over a period of several months and illustrates how inexorably his doctrine of justification by faith alone was compelling him to break with the past. His new evangelical convictions, when applied to the indulgence traffic, had brought him into conflict with his superiors whose authority he still respected with sincere humility. Both he and his opponents, however, now viewed the question of indulgences in a broader theological and ecclesiastical context. In explaining his theses Luther now applied his newly developed "theology of the cross," already enunciated in *The Heidelberg Disputation*, and challenged the authority of the church when it was in opposition to this new theology. His opponents correctly pointed to his deviations from scholastic theology and his actions in defiance of ecclesiastical authorities.

Notable throughout the *Explanations* is Luther's strong inner conflict, already voiced in his *Preface to a German Theology*. He writes respectfully of the pope but questions his primacy as bishop of Rome; he quotes the church fathers and canon law but treats the Bible as the primary – but not yet sole – authority in religious matters; he recognizes the ultimate authority of general church councils in matters of faith but opposes the burning of heretics, as was done at the Council of Constance; he still accepts purgatory and "the treasure of the church" but interprets them in an evangelical fashion; he dislikes tumult and disobedience but asks in unmistakable terms for a reformation of the church.

Luther planned his *Explanations* late in 1517, especially since he had learned that his opponents were misinterpreting a number of his statements. He was working on it early in 1518 and was ready to publish it in February. Its publication was held up, however, by the fact that Bishop Hieronymus Schulz (Scultetus), his superior, forbade it. Despite this prohibition, he turned the manuscript over to his publisher in April, but his trip to Heidelberg postponed its publication. Having promised Staupitz at Heidelberg that he would complete it, he resumed work on it after his return to Wittenberg. The revised form was finally published toward the end of August, 1518. Luther then sent copies and accompanying letters to his three ecclesiastical superiors, Bishop Schulz [WA, Br, 1,138-140], Vicar Staupitz [WA 1,525-527], and Pope Leo X [WA 1,527-529]. The pope received his copy while initiating the formal process against Luther. Although it in no way altered the pope's intentions, it greatly clarified the issues at stake in the indulgence controversy.

The *Explanations*, written in Latin, was first published by Johann Grüenberg in Wittenberg. The following English translation is based on this copy as edited in WA 1,525-628. It was published in German for the first time in the Leipzig Edition. This translation was included in volume 18, pages 299-533 of *Dr. Martin Luther's sämtliche Schriften*, edited by Johann Georg Walch (24 vols., Halle, 1740-1753), but the one in *St.L.* 18, 102-269 was made from the Latin in WA. The German translation in MA³ 1,142-295 was based on the German in volume 18 of Walch's edition, but the editor collated it with the Latin in WA and incorporated the corrections in the latter made by Theodor Brieger in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, XVII, 175ff. Cf. W. Kohler, *Dokumente zum Ablassstreit* (Leipzig, 1903), and Otto Clemen, "Beiträge zur Lutherforschung," *Festschrift für Theodor Brieger* (1912).

Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses

or

Explanations of the Disputation Concerning the Value of Indulgences

Declaration

Because this is a theological disputation, I shall repeat here the declaration usually made in the schools in order that I may pacify the individuals who, perhaps, are offended by the simple text of the disputation.

First, I testify that I desire to say or maintain absolutely nothing except, first of all, what is in the Holy Scriptures and can be maintained from them; and then what is in and from the writings of the church fathers and is accepted by the Roman church and preserved both in the canons and the papal decrees. But if any proposition cannot be proved or disproved from them I shall simply maintain it, for the sake of debate, on the basis of the judgment of reason and experience, always, however, without violating the judgment of any of my superiors in these matters.

I add one consideration and insist upon it according to the right of Christian liberty, that is, that I wish to refute or accept, according to my own judgment, the mere opinions of St. Thomas, Bonaventura, or other scholastics or canonists

which are maintained without text and proof. I shall do this according to the advice of Paul to ‘test everything, hold fast to that which is good’ [I Thess. 5:21], although I know the feeling of Thomists who want St. Thomas to be approved by the church in everything. The weight of St. Thomas’ authority is known well enough. From this declaration I believe that it is made sufficiently clear that I can err, but also that I shall not be considered a heretic for that reason, no matter how much those who think and wish differently should rage or be consumed with anger.

1

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

This I assert and in no way doubt.

1. Nevertheless, I shall prove the thesis for the sake of those who are uninformed, first from the Greek word *metanoiein*=te itself, which means ‘repent’ and could be translated more exactly by the Latin *transmentamini*, which means ‘assume another mind and feeling, recover one’s senses, make a transition from one state of mind to another, have a change of spirit’; so that those who hitherto have been aware of earthly matters may now know the spiritual, as the Apostle says in Rom. 12 [:2], ‘Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.’ By this recovery of one’s senses it happens that the sinner has a change of heart and hates his sin.

It is evident, however, that this recovery or hatred of oneself should involve one’s whole life, according to the passage, ‘He who hates his soul in this life, preserves it for eternal life’ [Matt. 10:39]. And again, ‘He who does not take his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me’ [Matt. 10:38]. And in the same chapter, ‘I have not come to bring peace, but a sword’ [Matt. 10:34]. In Matt. 5[:4], ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.’ And Paul in Romans 6 and 8 and in many other places orders us to mortify the flesh and members of the body which are upon earth. In Gal. 5[:24] he teaches us to crucify the flesh with its lustful desires. In II Corinthians 6 he says, ‘Let us show ourselves in much patience, in many fastings, etc.’ [Cf. II Cor. 6:4-5]. I produce these citations so extensively because I am dealing with those who are unacquainted with our teachings.

2. I shall prove this thesis also according to reason. Since Christ is the master of the spirit, not of the letter, and since his words are life and spirit [John 6:63], he must teach the kind of repentance which is done in spirit and in truth, but not that which the most arrogant hypocrites could do openly by distorting their faces in fasts and by praying in streets and heralding their giving of alms [Matt. 6:16]. Christ must teach a repentance, I say, which can be done in every walk of life, a repentance which the king in purple robes, the priest in his elegance, and the princes in their dignity can do just as well as the monk in his rituals and the mendicant in his poverty, just as Daniel and his companions did in Babylon [Dan. 1 and 3]. For the teaching of Christ must apply to all men, that is, to men in every walk of life.

3. We pray throughout our whole life and we must pray ‘forgive us our debts’ [Matt. 6:12]; therefore, we repent throughout our whole life and are displeased with ourselves, unless anyone may be so foolish as to think that he must pretend to pray for the forgiveness of debts. For the debts for which we are commanded to pray are real and not to be treated lightly; and even if they were venial, we could not be saved unless they were remitted.

2

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

I assert and examine this thesis also.

1. I assert it, first, because sacramental penance is temporal and cannot be done all the time; otherwise one would have to speak with the priest continually and do nothing else but confess one’s sins and perform the satisfaction which has been imposed. Therefore sacramental penance cannot be the cross which Christ bids us bear [Matt. 16:24]; nor is it a mortification of the passions of the flesh.

2. Sacramental penance is only external and presupposes inward penance without which it has no value. But inward penance can exist without the sacramental.

3. Sacramental penance can be a sham, inward penance cannot exist unless it is true and sincere. And if penance were not sincere, it would be hypocritical and not that which Christ teaches.

4. There is no teaching of Christ concerning sacramental penance but it is legally instituted by the popes and the church (at least with respect to its third part, namely satisfaction), and is thereby changeable by the will of the church. But evangelical penance is a divine law, never changeable; for it is unceasingly the sacrifice which is called a contrite and humble heart [Ps. 51:17].

5. The scholastic teachers with one accord distinguish at this point between real penance and sacramental penance, considering real penance as the material or the subject of sacramental penance.

3

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

I assert and maintain this thesis also.

First, in Rom. 12[:1], the Apostle enjoins us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; and how this may happen, he sets forth clearly and extensively in the passages that follow, in which he teaches us to be wise and humble, to serve one another, to esteem one another highly, to persist in prayer, to have patience, etc. [Rom. 12:3-21]. In the same manner also in II Corinthians 6 he says, "Let us conduct ourselves in much patience, in fastings and watchings etc." [Cf. II Cor. 6:4-5]. But in Matthew 5 and 6 Christ also teaches us to fast rightly, to pray, to give alms. Likewise, in another place, he says, "Of whatever you have, give alms, and behold all things are clean for you" [Cf. Luke 11:41].

Thus it follows that the three parts of satisfaction (fasting, prayer, and alms) do not pertain to sacramental penance as far as the essence of the deeds is concerned, since these things are the command of Christ. But they do pertain to sacramental penance as far as the exact manner and time of these satisfactions are concerned (which the church prescribes for this penance), namely, how long one must pray, fast, and give alms, as well as how much one must give for charity. But since these satisfactions are related to evangelical penance, fasting consists of all chastenings of the flesh apart from the choice of food or difference in clothes. Prayer includes every pursuit of the soul, in meditation, reading, listening, praying. The giving of alms includes every service toward one's neighbor. Thus by fasting a Christian may serve himself, by prayer he may serve God, and by the giving of alms he may serve his neighbor. By means of fasting he may conquer concupiscence of the flesh and live soberly and purely. By means of prayer he may conquer the pride of life and live in a godly manner. By means of giving alms he may conquer concupiscence of the eyes and live righteously in this world. Therefore all mortifications which the conscience-stricken man brings upon himself are the fruit of inner penance, whether they be vigils, work, privation, study, prayers, abstinence from sex and pleasures, insofar as they minister to the spirit. The Lord himself showed forth these fruits of the spirit as did all his saints. Jesus commanded, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" [Matt. 5:16]. Without doubt good works are the outward fruits of penance and of the Spirit, although the Spirit makes no sound except that of the turtledove, that is, the groaning of the heart which is the root of good works.

Against these three theses of mine, some shameful individual, going about as an ass under the cloak of a babbling lion, has maintained that it is a mistake for anyone to say that the word "penance" is not to be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance. First, it is not my purpose to refute his specific propositions. They are so foolishly and ignorantly composed that I cannot believe that the man under whose name they are published¹ and the man who has composed them² understand them. This fact is very evident to anyone who is fairly intelligent and well versed in the Scriptures.

Yet in order to show this man his ignorance (if he is capable of grasping the truth), I will make this first distinction. I admit that the term "penance" can be applied even to the penance of Judas, also to the penance which God requires, even to illusory penance, and, as the logicians are accustomed to distinguish, to a penance with respect to the essence of penance and secondly with respect to the intention behind it, and also with respect to the sacrament, that is, satisfaction. And who would deny that hitherto many theologians have been permitted to corrupt almost the whole Scripture with their daring distinctions and double meanings recently fabricated, so that for Paul and Christ we read patchworks of Paul and patchworks of Christ? I have spoken about the true and real significance of the word *metanoie=te* which Christ intended, or at least the meaning which John the Baptist intended, who himself had no authority to institute the sacrament and yet came preaching a baptism of repentance, saying, "Repent" [Mat t. 3:2; 4:7]. Christ repeated that word, and so I believe it is sufficiently understood that he did not speak of the sacrament of penance. Yet granting for the sake of argument that the nonsense of my refuter is true, let us see what follows from this.

Christ is without doubt a divine lawgiver and his doctrine is divine law, which no authority can change or dispense with. But if the penance taught by Christ signifies sacramental penance (satisfaction), and if the pope can change this and actually does change it according to his own will, then either the pope has divine law under his authority or else he is a most wicked adversary of his God, causing the command of God to be of no effect. If these false theologians dare to assert the former (these men who boast that they speak out on behalf of the revelation of truth and the suppression of errors to the glory of God, the defense of the catholic faith, and the honor of the holy apostolic throne), and if they so honor the church and defend the faith (these men who wish to appear as inquisitors of heretical perversity, a title which they boast of in a terrifying and vicious – I almost said "vain" – manner), what, I ask, is left for these most insane heretics,

since they also blaspheme and make accusations against the pope and the apostolic throne? With a free voice I would pronounce them not inquisitors but ingrafters of heretical perversity. Of such a nature and so intelligently stated are almost all the counter-theses which that most distinguished and most innocent paper is circulating indiscriminately, not willing to be subject to vanity [Rom. 8:20]. If I wanted to refute all of them a large volume would be necessary and nearly the entire chaos of the fourth book of the *Sentences*,³ along with its commentators, would have to be unraveled. But you, my reader, be free and honest, in order that you may discern the fallacies of all the other theses from this one.

4

The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self, that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

I also assert and examine this thesis.

1. A definite corollary follows from what has been said. If a person's whole life is one of repentance and a cross of Christ, not only in voluntary afflictions but also in temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh, and more especially also in persecutions and sufferings, as is clear from what has been said previously, and from the whole of Scripture and from examples of the saint of saints himself and all the martyrs, then it is evident that the cross continues until death and thereby to entrance into the kingdom.

2. This is evident also in the case of other saints. St. Augustine had copies prepared of the seven penitential psalms, prayed them with tears in his eyes and meditated upon them, declaring that even a bishop, no matter how righteously he may have lived, should not leave this world without penance. St. Bernard also, while he was in agony, shouted, "I have lived in a reckless manner for I have wasted my time; I have no thing, but I know that because my heart is contrite and humble, O God, Thou wilt not despise me" [Ps. 51:17].

3. This thesis is evident from reason. The cross of repentance must continue until, according to the Apostle, the body of sin is destroyed [Rom. 6:6] and the inveterate first Adam, along with its image, perishes, and the new Adam is perfected in the image of God. But sin remains until death, although it diminishes daily through the renewing of the mind.

4. At least the punishment of death remains in every case. This is the fear of death, which is surely the punishment of punishments and is itself worse than death in most cases, to say nothing of the fear of judgment and hell, the qualms of conscience, etc.

5

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

I discuss this thesis and humbly seek instruction. And as I have asked in the preface so I ask here, that if there is anyone who can instruct me, let him offer me a helping hand and consider my motives.

1. First I shall list the kinds of punishment which faithful believers can suffer.

The first punishment is eternal punishment, the hell of the damned, with which this thesis is not concerned. This punishment is certainly not in the power of the highest or the lowest bishop, as everybody throughout the whole church believes. God alone remits punishment through the remission of guilt.

The second punishment is that of purgatory which we shall consider later as a separate thesis. Meanwhile we accept the belief that purgatory does not come under the power of the pope or of any man.

The third punishment is that voluntary and evangelical punishment which is put into effect by spiritual penance in accordance with I Cor. 11[:31]: "If we were to judge ourselves surely we should not be judged by the Lord." This is the cross and mortification of suffering which is mentioned in Thesis 3. Since, however, this suffering has been commanded by Christ both with respect to the nature of spiritual penance and certainly with respect to the need of salvation, under no circumstances has the priest any power at all to increase or diminish it. For it depends not upon the authority of man but upon grace and the Holy Spirit. Nay, this punishment of the cross of mortification and suffering is even less in the power of the pope than all other punishments, whatever they may be. Accordingly, the pope is able to annul the eternal, purgatorial, and self-mortifying punishment, at least by prayer to God, just as he is able to obtain justifying grace for the sinner; but he is not able to remove this punishment of mortification and suffering even by prayer. Instead he should procure this punishment for the sinner and impose it no less than he procures grace, that is, he should announce that it has been imposed. Otherwise he would invalidate the cross of Christ [I Cor. 1:17] and unite the remnants of the Canaanites with his own sons and daughters, and he would not utterly destroy the enemies of God (sins). However, if he should see that some, with too much zeal, afflict themselves more than they should for their salvation and for the needs of others, he should not only remit but prohibit it, as St. Paul says to Timothy, "No longer drink only water," etc. [I Tim. 5:23].

The fourth punishment is God's correction and scourging, concerning which Psalm 89 says: "If, however, his children shall sin and not keep my law, I will punish their iniquities with the rod and their sins with the scourges of men [Cf. Ps. 89:30-33]. Who would doubt that this punishment is beyond the power of popes? For Jer. 49[:12] says that God imposes it upon the innocent: "If those who did not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, will you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you must drink." And that same prophet says (Jer. 25[:29]), "Behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished." Then St. Peter says (I Pet. 4[:17]), "For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not believe the gospel?" Revelation 3[:19] says, "Those whom I love, I punish." Hebrews 12[:6] says, "Moreover, he chastises every son whom he receives." But if the pope desires to remit God's correction or if sinners should believe that it is remitted, they would certainly become bastards and illegitimate children, as it is recorded in Heb. 12[:8], "If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." For John the Baptist and those who were the greatest of the saints endured chastisement.

Yet I will admit that through the prayers of the church some such punishments could be lifted from the weak, namely, sickness, cares, plagues, and fevers; for St. James taught the elders of the church to bring in and anoint the sick one in order that the Lord might relieve him through the prayer of faith [Jas. 5:14-16]. But why do I delay, as if there should be any doubt in the mind of a Christian that the rod of God can be removed, not by the power of the keys, but by tears and prayers, and by imposition of more punishments rather than by their remission, as for example in the case of the Ninevites who humbly scourged themselves by their penances and thereby managed to avert the rod of destruction intended for them [Jonah 3:6-10]. Otherwise, if a priest of the church, whether he be of high or low rank, can remove God's punishment by the power of the keys, then he also drives away plagues, wars, insurrections, earthquakes, fires, murders, thefts, as well as the Turks, Tartars, and other infidels; none but a poor Christian would fail to recognize in these the lash and rod of God. For Isa. 10 says, "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury! In its hand is my indignation" [Cf. Isa. 10:5]. Many, however, even the "big wheels" in the church, now dream of nothing else than war against the Turk. They want to fight, not against iniquities, but against the lash of iniquity and thus they would oppose God who says that through that lash he himself punishes us for our iniquities because we do not punish ourselves for them.

The fifth punishment which the pope cannot remit is the canonical punishment, which is instituted by the church. There is no doubt that this rightfully belongs in the hand of the pope, but only in such a way that there is (as they say) a valid reason for their remission and that the bearer of the keys does not err. Yet in my brazenness I would not accept this "valid reason" as cut-and-dried, as many are accustomed to do. The pious desire of the pope seems to be sufficient, and this may be a valid enough reason. Nor do I see how a mistake of the keys affects this remission, or if it does affect it, what harm it does, since the soul may nevertheless be saved even if punishments of that sort are not remitted because of error.

More attention must be given to this canonical punishment since the pope, in plenary remission, does not remit all punishments stipulated in canon law. For example, he does not remit either free or forced entrance of persons into a monastery, a punishment not unknown in canon law. Nor does he remit the civil, or rather, the criminal punishments which are imposed by civil law, although his legates may do this wherever they personally are present. He seems, therefore, to remit only those which are imposed concerning fasts, prayers, alms giving, and other works and disciplines, some for seven years, some for less, some for more. And in this category of punishments which the pope does not remit I include also that which a priest of the church imposes in accord with his own judgment. Look now and teach me, you who can. He cannot remit the first four; what else does he remit except punishment which is canonical and arbitrary?

Here again my opponent snarls at me in that lion skin,⁴ saying the punishment exacted by divine justice or to be cleansed in purgatory is remitted. To him I answer that it is most wicked to assume that the pope has authority to change the divine law and to relax that which divine justice imposes. For God does not say, "Whatever I shall have bound, you shall loose," but rather "whatever you loose, shall be loosed, although you shall not loose every thing that is bound, but only that which is bound by you, not that which is bound by me" [Cf. Matt. 16:19]. They, however, understand it to mean, "Whatever you shall have loosed either in heaven or on earth, shall be loosed," whereas Christ has purposely added the words "on earth" to restrict the power of the keys to earth, for he knew that otherwise they would perforate heaven itself.

The sixth punishment which I wish to consider as one which the pope cannot remit, unless I am taught otherwise, is that which they say divine justice requires in order that it may be satisfied. If this punishment is different from the third and fifth, as it must be if it is to be the sixth, it is impossible to imagine in what respect, unless it is because the third and fifth were not sufficient, so that additional punishment has to be imposed in the form of more prayer, fasting, alms giving. Therefore this sixth punishment is distinguished from the fifth or the third only by the degree of intensity. It cannot be understood as punishment according to civil law, for the pope does not remit this (as I have already said); otherwise the letters of indulgences of the church could remove all gallows and racks. Nor can it have reference to punishment according to canon law actually (*de facto*) imposed by the judgment of a law court dealing with matters in dispute, since

the pope does not remit excommunications, interdicts, or other ecclesiastical penalties which have been meted out, as is evident enough from experience. All that remains, therefore, is that which I said I would consider [the punishment that divine justice requires]. But I am absolutely convinced that there is no such punishment. First, because by no authority of Scripture, of teachers, or of the accepted interpretation of the canons can it be taught that there is such punishment; and it is utterly absurd to teach anything in the church for which a basis cannot be found in the Scriptures, in teachers, in the canons, or at least in human reason. Secondly: granted there were some such punishment, it would nevertheless not pertain to the remission granted by the pope, for it has been imposed voluntarily over and beyond the canons, indeed not imposed at all but undertaken voluntarily. Therefore it is a different punishment from punishments which have been imposed, as I have mentioned above in my discussion of the fifth punishment.

But if you should say, "In what way does a person satisfy divine justice if for some reason the canonical or priestly punishment were not sufficient?", my answer would be that one does quite enough by means of the third and fourth punishment to a degree which is known to God alone. It is not recorded anywhere that God has required any other than the third and sometimes the fourth, as in the case of David and the children of Israel, recorded in the books of Judges and Kings.

But God is nearly always satisfied with a contrite heart and with the punishment of the third type. Hence I wonder at the negligence of some people, who, in order to add satisfaction, say that Christ absolved the adulteress in the Gospel without satisfaction, but that he did not absolve Mary Magdalene without satisfaction, and so the Master must be imitated in the case of Mary, but not in the case of the adulteress, since the sin of no one may be remitted without satisfaction. For these people say that Jesus did not cleanse the lepers without requiring that they should satisfy the law and show themselves to the priest [Luke 17:12-19]. This is, therefore, the punishment which divine justice requires beyond those punishments already mentioned.

I reply by saying that, in my opinion, the adulteress endured more punishments and made greater satisfaction than Mary Magdalene. Indeed she already suffered death and saw nothing but the severest judgment. So she was crucified exceedingly and grieved far more than Mary, for whom judgment of death was not imminent. Therefore, her punishment was of the fourth and third types, because she endured the sting of death with a contrite heart. Mary Magdalene, on the other hand, paid the punishment of the third type; and it is evident that her punishment can not be shown to have been different. But concerning the lepers I say that they were commanded to show themselves, not for satisfaction, but for testimony; for leprosy was not a sin but simply signified sin. Moreover, as everyone knows, satisfaction does not consist in showing the sin but in seeking to obtain the judgment of the priest, all of which is well known.

2. I prove the thesis in this manner. The two powers of binding and loosing are equal and they relate to the same matter. But the pope has no power to bind and loose any punishment beyond that of canonical law or the fifth punishment. Therefore he does not have any power to loose and remove them, otherwise it would have to be said that these two powers are unequal in extent. But if they are said to be unequal no one is required to believe it, since it is proved nowhere by the Scripture and canons, and since the text is clear where Christ gives power to bind on earth and loose on earth, by measuring and extending each power equally.

3. I shall prove my thesis from the fifth book of the *Decretals* of Gregory IX where the chapter "Concerning Penance and Remission," beginning with the words, *Quod autem*, expressly says that remissions which have not been made by a judge are not valid for individuals, since no one can be bound or loosed by his own judgment alone."⁵ It is certain that a man is not under the jurisdiction of the pope in the first, second, third, fourth, and sixth punishments, but only in the fifth, as is clearly evident and will become more evident later.

Deduction

It follows that satisfaction is not sacramental simply because it makes satisfaction for guilt (because the third and fourth punishments make satisfaction for guilt), but because it makes satisfaction for guilt according to the statutes of the church. The greatest satisfaction one makes to God is through a new life, etc. And it must also be proved by Scripture that no other satisfaction is required for sins.

And then there is John the Baptist, who was sent according to the plan and decree of God for the purpose of preaching repentance. He also said "Repent" [Matt. 3:2], and again, "Bear fruits that befit repentance" [Luke 3:8]. John himself explained these words; for after the crowd had asked what they should do, he answered, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" [Luke 3:11]. Do you not see that he imposes no penance except that of observing the commands of God, and that he therefore desires that penance be understood as nothing except conversion and the change to a new life? But this is seen even more clearly in the passage where the tax collectors came to him and said, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said, "Nothing more than you have been commanded to do" (Cf. Luke 3:12-13). Has he in any way said here, "It is necessary for you to make satisfaction for

past sins?" He said the same thing to the soldiers: "Terrify no one by threats, accuse no one falsely, and be content with your wages" [Cf. Luke 3:14]. Has he in any way imposed anything here other than the ordinary commands of God? But if this teacher of repentance, who has been raised up by God for this purpose, does not teach us that we must make satisfaction, doubtless he has deceived us and has not taught us enough about the duty of repentance.

The second passage is Ezekiel 18: "If a wicked man turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live and shall not die" [Cf. Ezek. 18:21]. Behold, he imposes nothing except justice and righteousness, and these things must be done in every aspect of his life, according to that passage which says, "Blessed are they who observe justice, and do righteousness at all times" [Ps. 106:3]. Has this prophet also deceived us?

The third passage is Micah 6[:8]: "I will show you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." You see what satisfaction God requires of man. In short, Micah speaks forth ridiculing those who wish to make satisfaction through works, saying, "What shall I offer that is worthy of the Lord? Shall I ever offer him burnt offerings and calves a year old? Can he ever be pleased with thousands of rams or with thousands of he-goats? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" [Mic. 6:6,7]. This implies that we should say, "No," for God requires no such things because of sin, but rather he requires justice, compassion, and fear. This, as I have said, means a new life.

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.

The first part of this thesis is so evident that some have even admitted that a figurative manner of speech is employed when it is said that the pope grants remission of guilt. Others admit that they do not understand it. But everyone confesses that the guilt is remitted by God alone, according to the passage in Isa. 43[:25], "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." And John 1[:29], "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." And Ps. 130[:3,4], "If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee." And farther on, "With the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities" [Ps. 130:7-8]. And Ps. 51[:10], "Create in me a clean heart, O God, etc." There are many other references of this kind in the Scriptures. And St. Augustine in so many of his writings against the Donatists maintains absolutely that sins are remitted by God alone.

The second part of the thesis is likewise clear enough, for he who would reject reserved cases would surely have no guilt remitted. "He who rejects you," Jesus says, "rejects me" [Luke 10:16]. Indeed, God does not remit the guilt of anyone who does not at the same time have respect for the office of the keys. Since everybody concedes the truth of this thesis, it is not necessary to support it by my statement. However, I will indicate here what moves me to do so, and once more I will confess my ignorance, if anyone thinks it worth while to enlighten me and to make this matter clearer.

The first part of this thesis seems to be a figurative manner of speech or an idea inconsistent with the wording of the Gospel, since it says that the pope looses, that is, declares that the guilt is loosed and approves the loosing. For the text does not say, "Whatever I shall loose in heaven, you shall loose on earth." But on the contrary it says, "Whatever you shall loose on earth, I may loose or it shall be loosed in heaven," so that what is meant is that God approves that which the priest looses rather than the opposite. With regard to the second part of this thesis it is certain that those cases which the pope looses God also looses, and that no one can be reconciled to God unless he is first reconciled to the church, at least by desire. Nor is an offense against God removed while it still remains an offense against the church. But it is questionable whether a man is also reconciled to God as soon as he is reconciled to the church. The text certainly says that all things loosed in the church are also loosed in heaven, but it does not seem to follow that therefore absolutely all things are loosed in heaven, but merely those things which are loosed in the church. In my opinion these two questions are not unimportant questions concerning which I shall perhaps disclose my judgment more fully in the following thesis.

7

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

I maintain this thesis. And since it has been thoroughly approved by the consensus of everyone, it does not require further discussion and proof. Yet I am still trying to understand it and I shall voice my understanding of it in simple terms. This thesis maintains, along with the preceding thesis, that God does not remit guilt unless there is a prior remission by the priest, at least by desire, as the text clearly indicates: "Whatsoever you loose, etc." [Matt. 16:19]. And that passage in

Matt. 5[:24] says, ‘First go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.’ And this, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s’ [Matt. 22:21]. And in the Lord’s Prayer it says, ‘Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors’ [Matt. 6:12]. In all these passages remission is indicated as taking place on earth before it takes place in heaven. One is right in asking how these things can take place before the infusion of grace, that is, before the remission of God, for man cannot have his guilt forgiven or the desire to seek remission without first of all having the grace of God which remits.

So it seems to me, and I declare: When God begins to justify a man, he first of all condemns him; him whom he wishes to raise up, he destroys; him whom he wishes to heal, he smites; and the one to whom he wishes to give life, he kills, as he says in I Kings 2 [I Sam. 2:6], and Deut. 32[:39], ‘I kill and I make alive, etc.’ He does this, however, when he destroys man and when he humbles and terrifies him into the knowledge of himself and of his sins, in order that the wretched sinner may say, ‘There is no health in my bones because of my sins; there is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation’ [Ps. 38:3].

For thus do the mountains fall away before the face of the Lord. Thus does he send his arrows and scatter them, ‘at thy rebuke, O Lord, and at the breath of the spirit of thy wrath’ [Ps. 18:15]. Thus sinners are turned to hell and their faces are filled with shame. David often experienced such consternation and trembling, as he confesses with groans in many different psalms. However, in this consternation is the beginning of salvation, for the ‘fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ [Ps. 111:10]. Nahum says that when the Lord cleanses, he makes no one innocent: ‘His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet’ [Nah. 1:3]. Here his lightnings flash, the earth sees it and is moved; here his arrows fly and stick fast, the voice of his thunder rolls, that is, rolls all around, the waters see and tremble; here, in short, God works a strange work in order that he may work his own work. This is true contrition of heart and humility of spirit, the sacrifice most pleasing to God. Here is the sacrificial victim cut into pieces and the skin drawn and kindled for the burnt offering. And here (as they say) grace is infused, as Isa. 41[:3] says, ‘He pursues them and passes on safely.’ And in Isa. 66[:2]: ‘My spirit rests upon him, but only upon that one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.’ And in Isa. 38[:6] Hezekiah says, ‘O Lord, if in such things is the life of my spirit, restore me to health and make me live.’

Actually man knows so little about his justification that he believes he is very near condemnation, and he looks upon this, not as infusion of grace but as a diffusion of the wrath of God upon him. Blessed is he, however, if he endures this trial, for just when he thinks he has been consumed, he shall arise as the morning star. However, as long as he remains in this wretched, perplexed state of conscience, he has neither peace nor consolation, unless he flees to the power of the church and seeks solace and relief from his sins and wretchedness which he has uncovered through confession. For neither by his own counsel or his strength will he be able to find peace; in fact, his sadness will finally be turned into despair. When the priest sees such humility and anguish, he shall, with complete confidence in the power given him to show compassion, loose the penitent and declare him loosed, and thereby give peace to his conscience.

To be sure, the person who is to be absolved must guard himself very carefully from any doubt that God has remitted his sins, in order that he may find peace of heart. For if he is uncertain of the anguish of his conscience (as it must always be if it is a true sorrow), yet he is constrained to abide by the judgment of another, not at all on account of the prelate himself or his power, but on account of the word of Christ who cannot lie when he says, ‘Whatever you loose on earth’ [Matt. 16:19]. For faith born of this word will bring peace of conscience, for it is according to this word that the priest shall loose. Whoever seeks peace in another way, for example, inwardly through experience, certainly seems to tempt God and desires to have peace in fact, rather than in faith. For you will have peace only as long as you believe in the word of that one who promised, ‘Whatever you loose, etc.’ [Matt. 16:19]. Christ is our peace, but only through faith. But if anyone does not believe this word, even though he be pardoned a million times by the pope himself, even though he confess before the whole world, he shall never know inner peace.

This peace, therefore, is that sweetest power, for which, from the depth of our hearts, we ought to give the greatest thanks to God, who has given such power to men – that power which is the only consolation for sins and for wretched consciences, if only men will believe that which Christ has promised is true. Thus the question raised above is now clear, namely, that even if the remission of guilt takes place through the infusion of grace before the remission of the priest, this infusion is of such a nature and is so hidden under the form of wrath that man is not sure whether that grace is present or not; for the Scripture says, ‘accordingly his footprints are not recognized’ [Ps. 77:19], and ‘by paths his feet have not trod’ [Isa. 41:3].

So as a general rule we are not sure of the remission of guilt, except through the judgment of the priest, and not even through him unless you believe in Christ who has promised, ‘Whatever you shall loose, etc.’ [Matt. 16:19]. Moreover, as long as we are uncertain, there is no remission, since there is not yet remission for us. Indeed, one would perish woefully unless it should become certain, for he would not believe that remission had taken place for him.

Thus Christ spoke to Simon, the leper, concerning Mary Magdalene, ‘Her sins...are forgiven’ [Luke 7:47], by which he certainly indicated that she had already received grace. But she did not recognize this infusion of grace, since there was no peace in her bones because of her sins, until he turned to her and said, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ [Luke 7:48]. ‘Your faith has saved you’ [Luke 7:50], that faith, namely, by which she believed Him who forgave her sins. Therefore the words, ‘Go in peace’ [Luke 7:50] followed. And the sins of the adulteress [John 8:3 -11] had already been forgiven before Christ raised her. But she did not recognize this, since there were so many accusers around her, until she heard the voice of the bridegroom who said, ‘Woman,...has no one condemned you?...Neither do I condemn you’ [John 8:10,11]. And surely David, after he had sinned and, by the command of God, had been reprimanded by the prophet Nathan [II Sam. 12:1-15], would have been struck dead immediately, when, moved by the justifying grace of God, he cried out, ‘I have sinned’ (for this is the voice of the righteous when they first accuse themselves), if Nathan had not pardoned him immediately by saying, ‘The Lord has also put away your sin, you shall not die’ [II Sam. 12:13]. For why did he add, ‘You shall not die,’ if it were not that he saw him overwhelmed by the terror of his sin and in despair? Hezekiah, also, when he heard that he was to die, would have died if he had not accepted comfort and the sign from Isaiah that he would enter the house of the Lord again [Isa. 38:4-8]; when he believed him he received at the same time both peace and remission of sins, as he says: ‘You have cast all my sins behind you.’ And, generally speaking, how could those in the Old Testament have had any confidence in the mercy of God and in the remission of sins, if God had not shown them by revelations, inspirations, burnt offerings, providing a cloud, and other signs, that whatever they sacrificed was pleasing to him. And he desires to accomplish that same thing now by the word and judgment of the priests.

Therefore, God’s remission effects grace, but the priest’s remission brings peace, which is both the grace and gift of God, since it is faith in actual remission and grace. It is my opinion that this grace is what our teachers declare is conferred – efficaciously through the sacraments of the church. It is not, however, the first justifying grace which adults must have before the sacrament, but, as Rom. 1[:17] has it, ‘faith for faith.’ For one who approaches God must believe [Heb. 11:6]. But one who has been baptized must also believe that he had believed and approached properly, or else he shall never have that peace which is gotten only through faith. Therefore Peter did not loose before Christ did, but declared and disclosed the loosing by Christ. Whoever believes this confidently has truly obtained the peace and remission of God (that is, he is sure that he is pardoned), not by the certainty of the process but by the certainty of faith, according to the infallible word of the one who has mercifully promised, ‘Whatever you shall loose, etc.’ [Matt. 16:19]. Thus we read in Rom 5[:1] that, having been justified freely by his grace, we have peace with God through faith, certainly not through the process itself, etc.

But if I discern rightly and truly, then it is not wrong or improper to say, as my opponents want to say, that the pope remits guilt. Indeed, the remission of guilt is far better than the remission of any kind of punishment, though they preach only the latter and do so in such a manner that they make the remission of guilt of little significance in the church, while actually it is just the opposite. For when a man through the remission of guilt (which he cannot bestow upon himself, for no one should believe in himself unless he prefers to make two disorders out of one) has found peace through the acceptance of faith in absolution, every punishment is to him as no punishment at all. For anxiety of conscience makes the punishment harmful, but cheerfulness of conscience makes punishment desirable.

And we see that this understanding which the people have concerning the power of the keys is adequate when they seek and receive absolution in simple faith. But certain intellectuals, by their contritions, works, and confessions, endeavor to find peace for themselves but do nothing more than go from restlessness to restlessness because they trust in themselves and their works, while, if they feel torment of conscience, they should believe in Christ who says, ‘Whatever you shall loose, etc.’ [Matt. 16:19]. More recent theologians, however, contribute entirely too much to this torment of conscience by treating and teaching the sacrament of penance in such a way that people learn to trust in the delusion that it is possible to have their sins cancelled by their contritions and satisfactions. This most vain conceit can accomplish nothing more than it did for the woman in the Gospel who had a flow of blood and whose whole fortune was used up for doctors [Mark 5:25-34] so as to make the situation even worse. The people must first be taught faith in Christ, the gracious bestower of remission. Then they must be persuaded to despair of their own contrition and satisfaction so that, when they have been strengthened by confidence and joy of heart over the compassion of Christ, they finally may despise sin cheerfully, become contrite, and make satisfaction.

Also the jurists have given encouragement to that torture of conscience. In extolling the power of the pope they placed more value and awe upon the power of the pope than they did respect for the word of Christ in faith. People must be taught that if they really want to find peace for their consciences they should learn to place their confidence, not in the power of the pope, but in the word of Christ who gives the promise to the pope. For it is not because the pope grants it that you have anything, but you have it because you believe that you receive it. You have only as much as you believe according to the promise of Christ.

Moreover, if the power of the keys would have no such value for peace of heart and remission of guilt, then, indeed (as some say) indulgences would be of little value. For what matter of great importance is conferred if remission of punishments is granted, since Christians ought to despise even death?

By the same token, why did Christ say, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven" [John 20:23], except that they are not forgiven to anyone unless he believes that they are forgiven for him through the remission of the priest? Thus the power is not conferred in the words, "If you forgive the sins of any," but in the words, "they are forgiven," the sinner is challenged to faith in the remission; just as the power is given in the words, "whatever you shall loose," and our faith is aroused in the words, "they shall be loosed." For Christ could have said, "If you forgive punishments or chastisements of any, you shall remit," if he wanted us to understand it that way. But he knew that conscience, already justified by grace, would by its own anxiety cast out grace if it had not been aided by faith in the presence of grace, through the ministry of the priest. Indeed the sin would have remained if he had not believed that it was remitted. For the remission of sin and the gift of grace are not enough; one must also believe that one's sin has been remitted. And this is the witness that the Spirit of God gives to our spirit, that we are children of God [Rom. 8:18]; for to be a child of God is so great a mystery (for he may appear to himself to be an enemy of God) that if one does not believe it to be so, it cannot be so. The Lord causes his saints to marvel in such a way that no one would have confidence in the one who justifies and heals him, if he did not believe that he was justified and healed; just as the sick man would not believe that the doctor cuts his body out of a desire to heal his infirmity, if he were not so persuaded by good friends.

Therefore I am not concerned whether the priest is a necessary cause for the remission of sins or whether there is some other cause, as long as it is somehow clear that the priest truly remits sins and guilt, just as a sick man's health is truly attributed to his friends because it was by their persuasion that the sick man believed in the doctor who operated on him.

This is not the place to consider the question, "What if the priest should err?" since that remission rests not upon the priest, but upon the word of Christ. So regardless of whether the priest should do it for the sake of money or honor, you should only desire remission without assuming anything, and should believe in Christ who promises it. Indeed, even if the priest should pardon you in a spirit of levity, nevertheless you shall obtain peace from your faith. When he also administers baptism or the eucharist, your faith receives the full benefit of the sacrament, regardless of whether he should seek money or be in a mood of levity and play. So great a matter is the word of Christ and man's faith in him. For we read in the history of the martyrs that a certain actor, in a spirit of jest and for the purpose of ridiculing baptism, desired to be baptized by his pagan companions and immediately crowned by them with martyrdom. Likewise when St. Athanasius was a boy, he baptized boys whom the bishop of Alexandria afterwards declared baptized, as recorded in church history. Indeed, St. Cyprian censured a peace bestowed rashly by a certain bishop, Therapius, but he wanted it to be approved. Therefore, we are justified by faith, and by faith also we receive peace, not by works, penance, or confessions.

With respect to my sixth and seventh theses, that ass of ours in lion's skin⁶ triumphs with glory. Indeed he sings a hymn of victory over me before the victory is won, and from that bilge water of opinions⁷ he draws another distinction between a satisfying and avenging punishment on the one hand, and a healing and curing punishment on the other, as if it were necessary to believe in people who dream up these things. Yet they very wisely conceal this distinction from the people. Otherwise indulgences, rather the money, would decrease if the people should realize that such trifling and useless avenging (that is, fabricated) punishments were remitted. Then in order to show everybody that he does not know what is of the old or of the new priesthood, he introduces another obscurity of words and draws another distinction of the keys, namely, among those of authority, superiority, and office. So our illustrious masters, inquisitors of the inquisition and defenders of the Catholic faith, have learned nothing except what they have imbibed from the confusing and obsolete questions of the fourth book of the Sentences.⁷ Perhaps they wish that whatever Christ shall loose with the keys of superiority in heaven (for on earth he himself does not loose) shall be loosed by God in a "superheaven." Then, in order that the pope may be God, some other higher God must be invented, who looses in the higher heaven whatever the pope has loosed with the keys of authority.

But away with such nonsense. We know of only one type of keys, namely, those which are given to earth. Now my opponents contend this: "He therefore errs who says that the priest of the new law looses only by confirmation and declaration." That was the office of the Jewish priesthood. What sagacity of spirit and monstrous weight of erudition this is! And they are the ones who are considered most worthy to try heretics and defend the catholic faith, however against stones and sticks. How much more accurately did the Apostle Paul assert that the old priesthood consisted in judging lepers, the administration of justice, and purifications of the flesh, in food, drink, clothing and festival days, etc. Justification of spirit and purity of heart which Christ worked in the church by the ministry of the new priesthood were signified by these figures of speech. I have not advanced the sixth thesis enthusiastically, as I have mentioned, but for the sake of the feelings of others. These adversaries of mine and all their masters up to the present time cannot show how the priest remits guilt unless they do so by advancing that heretical but usual opinion which says that the sacraments of the

new law give justifying grace to those who place no obstacle in the way. But it is impossible to proffer the sacrament in a salutary manner except to those who already believe and are just and worthy. The one who approaches the sacrament must believe [Heb. 11:6]. Therefore it is not the sacrament, but faith in the sacrament, that justifies. No matter what these arrogant sophists may chatter, it is much more plausible to say that the priest of the new law only declares and confirms the absolution of God, that is, points it out, and by this pointing out of his and by his judgment calms the conscience of the sinner, who is bound to believe and have peace by this judgment of the priest. In the same manner the priest of the old law calmed those whom he judged clean in body and clothing, though, he himself could make no one clean, not even himself. For what that does for the body, this does for the conscience. Just so does the spirit respond to the letter and the truth to the symbol. And I am waiting to see how those defenders of the catholic faith could explain the power of the keys in any other way, without becoming snarled in heresy.

8

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

I shall examine this thesis, although there are many people who wonder why it should be open to question.

1. The first proof of this thesis is that passage in Rom. 7[:1]: "The law is binding on a person only during his life." Although the Apostle interprets this to mean the divine law, this statement of Scripture is even more applicable to human law, as the Apostle says in the same chapter, "If her husband dies a woman is discharged from the law concerning the husband" [Rom. 7:2]. To an even greater extent one who is dead is discharged from the law which applies to the one who is still alive. The Apostle makes his proof from the lesser to the greater. If he who is alive is released from the law through the death of the other, then even more so is the dead person released from the same law which releases the one who is alive.

2. Canon laws, like all other man-made laws, are, according to chapter 29,⁹ bound by the circumstances of time, place, and persons, as everybody knows. It is only about the word of Christ that it has been said; "Thy word, O Lord, endures forever, thy truth to all generations" [Cf. Ps. 119:89-90], "And his righteousness endures forever" [Cf. Ps. 111:3]. The word and righteousness of men, however, remain only for a time. Therefore when these circumstances are changed the laws also cease, unless one should say that after a city has been destroyed the deserted place that remains is still obliged to do everything which the city did before. This is absurd.

3. Justice requires that the living be released from the canon laws and that the law be changed when the circumstances back of the law cease or when the law inclines toward injustice. Pope Leo says that the law should not militate against love because it is for the sake of love that the law is established. Then surely that which begins to militate against unity, peace, etc. must cease. If the living are released from the laws, how much more should the dead be released! In the latter case, not only the circumstances back of the law cease, but the person himself ceases. And it is for him and for the conditions of his life that the laws were originally established.

4. The very words of the law prove this thesis for in the law the days and years, fasts, watches, labors, pilgrimages, and so forth are clearly stipulated. All these stipulations clearly belong to this life and end with death. At death a person passes into an entirely different life, at which time he neither fasts, weeps, eats, nor sleeps, since he no longer has a body. It is for this reason that Jean Gerson¹⁰ dared to condemn indulgences which were bestowed as being valid for many thousands of years. And I cannot help wondering what happened to the inquisitors of heresy that they have not burned this heretic even after his death, for he condemned indulgences which entitled recipients to many thousand years and he spoke out so confidently against the custom of every pilgrimage station in the city [Rome]. He spoke out also against the practice of that squanderer of indulgences, Sixtus IV, as a result of which the latter warned his prelates that it was their duty to correct and give careful attention to these indulgence practices. He referred to the claims of these indulgences as foolish and superstitious, etc.

5. When one considers the intention of the legislator of the canons, it is evident that he did not once think that canons of this sort should be imposed upon the dying. Suppose we were to ask this question of the pope who imposes such canons: "Whom do you understand, Holy Father, to be included in your law, the living or the dead?" What answer will he give except this: "Why the living, of course. For what could I do with the dead who have been removed from my jurisdiction?"

6. A priest of Christ would act most cruelly if he did not set his brother free from the law, as he would wish for himself. And there is no reason why he should not do it, for it is in his power to do so.

7. If the penitential canons apply to the dead, then by the same token all the other canons apply. Therefore the dead should observe the festivals; keep the feasts, fasts, and watches; observe the canonical hours; on certain days eat no eggs, milk, meat but only oil, fish, fruit, vegetables; wear black or white clothes according to the different days; and bear

other exceedingly heavy burdens which oppress that wretched church of Christ which formerly was most free. There is no reason why some canons should cease because of time, and not all. If the canons which are good and beneficial to life cease, why should not those cease even more which afflict men and are unprofitable and a hindrance? Or do we even here imagine that a transposition has been made and that, just as the dead suffer certain punishments which are in proportion to what they deserve, just so they perform certain works which are in proportion to what they deserve and thereby that one might say of them that they observe the canonical hours?

8. As a matter of fact, penitential as well as moral canons are waived for those who are sick in body and not on the verge of death. A sick priest, for example, is not obligated to say public prayers and celebrate public worship. Therefore others also are not obligated to fast, watch, or abstain from meat, eggs, milk. And not only are sick people free from all these obligations, but they are forbidden to do all those things which formerly they were ordered to do when they were in good health. Indeed one should say to them now that the hand of the Lord has already touched them! "Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh (that is, my sickness)?" [Job 19:22]. Therefore I contend that the canons are not imposed upon the sick, but upon the healthy and the strong, thus much less upon the dead than upon the living. And if those who are on the verge of death and those who have already died are not free, why then are not the sick also oppressed and tormented by the same canons? And after these individuals have finally regained their health, if they are not obligated to make up for their omissions during their period of sickness, how is one to believe that after death the canons must be made up or fulfilled?

But at this point some people say, "Suppose some healthy person will have omitted performing the imposed penances and will confess this when he is about to die? In this case it appears that such a person must of necessity pay these penances in purgatory, even if no other penances needed to be imposed or would be imposed." My answer is: Not at all, for by such an omission he has done nothing more than sin against the precepts of the church, and for that he must grieve. He must not be required to make up and fulfil the canons for that which concerns the past, but only for that which is to come. "Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day, tomorrow will be anxious for itself" [Matt. 6:34]. But if the transgression of every law remains to be satisfied, so that no transgression remains, even more should transgressions of the divine laws be made up. Yet it is impossible for adultery to be an act in which chastity is not lost.

9. Whoever submits to a greater punishment than that which has been imposed upon him, deservedly and by natural right receives remission of lesser punishments, but the one who is about to die submits to the last, the highest, and the greatest punishment of all, namely, death. Therefore in the face of death every other punishment should be waived, since scarcely anyone is strong enough for this one punishment. And imagine if one who is about to die were to present himself before a legislator at death, would not that legislator immediately retract his punishment?

10. Certain distinguished teachers in the church say that any Christian may be the richest of men because through a voluntary death he could discharge every debt and immediately fly to heaven, for nothing could be greater than a death voluntarily undertaken for the sake of God. It is therefore useless for the pope to reserve the punishments of canon law until after death. William of Paris¹¹ and Gerson¹² shared this opinion, and many rational individuals agree with them.

11. If death is not sufficient punishment unless the one who is dead suffers also the punishments which the canons impose, then the punishment of the canons will be greater than the punishment of death, since the former continues even beyond death and will work harm to the death of Christians, concerning which death the Scripture says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" [Ps. 116:15].

12. Imagine that the sinner might be snatched away and immediately suffer martyrdom because he confesses Christ before he has satisfied the canons. This is said to have happened to the martyr, St. Boniface. Will purgatory then detain such a person, preventing him from being with Christ? Can he then be prayed for in the church as a martyr?¹³ But every person who dies voluntarily (it is that type of person we are talking about, that is, a Christian) also dies according to the will of God.

13. Why do not the civil laws also remain to be enforced after death, since they too are binding before God and in heaven, not by virtue of their own strength but by the testimony of Christ and the apostles Peter and Paul, who teach that one must be brought into subjection to them in spirit and with respect to conscience, for such is the will of God? [Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13-17].

14. The punishments of canon law cease when a penitent layman changes his position, when, for example, he becomes a priest, or when a priest becomes a bishop or a monk. And if this cessation of canonical punishment takes place in this life, should it not take place when a change is brought about by death? What is more absurd than this?

15. The opinion that punishments stipulated by canon law must be satisfied after death has absolutely no authority in Scripture, the canons, or acceptable reason, but appears to have been introduced purely by the slothfulness and negligence of the priests, as have many other superstitions.

16. To prove our point we have examples from the ancient fathers, of whom Cyprian is probably the most exacting observer of ecclesiastical censures and disciplines. In his Letter 17, Book III,¹⁴ he bids us give peace to those

who are exposed to the danger of death, so they may come to the Lord in peace after they have made confession either to the presbyter or the deacon, as he says in the same passage. This giving of peace, however, is nothing more than that which is now called “plenary remission,” as anyone can see who has given any thought to this work.

We do conclude, therefore, that punishments stipulated by canon law must be imposed only upon the living, and even then only upon those who are healthy and strong; actually only upon the sluggards and those who of their own accord do not wish to lead a better life. I certainly would not have drawn out this discussion so far if it weren’t for the fact that certain individuals oppose me too strenuously with their assertions which they can in no way prove. If I wanted to deal with the wise and learned, I would keep quiet rather than speak.

At this point someone may say, “When you speak in this manner you cheapen indulgences exceedingly, that is, when you say that only canonical punishments are remitted and not all punishments, and even they are remitted only for this life.” I answer that it is better to cheapen indulgences than to make the cross of Christ of no effect. And it is better for one to hold indulgences of little value than to teach some fiction in the church which could be discussed in such a manner that the church is confused. To be sure, I confess quite frankly and declare publicly that I do not care much for indulgences as a remission of punishments, in which my opponents glory. However, I particularly respect, cherish, and rejoice in them as a remission of guilt in the sense in which I set this forth previously, but they think very little of it.

One leaden dagger opposes this eighth thesis, because it is found in the laws that even the dead are excommunicated, as the chapter, *A Nobis*, in the work [of Pope Gregory IX], *Concerning the Sentence of Excommunication*, especially proves.¹⁵ Oh, how afraid I was that my opponents would say that they had also discovered that reasonable punishments and satisfactions would be imposed upon the dead! It is good that they said the dead would only be excommunicated. No one denies that the dead are also absolved. But what does this absolution have to do with the remission of punishments? Is this that most subtle dialectic, without which, they teach, no one may become a theologian? Perhaps the conclusion which follows contains a fifth figure which says, “A person is absolved from excommunication, therefore, the punishments of satisfaction are remitted to him.” Why, then, do these hucksters bestow indulgences so indiscriminately if the person who is absolved from sin soon has remission of punishments also? If, however, satisfaction still remains for those who are absolved, how can absolution be profitable for the dead or remove punishment? Therefore such reasoning as this is hopeless, for just as excommunication extends to those who are dead so also does remission of punishments.

The jurists themselves say that excommunication of the dead does no harm to the dead, just as absolution does them no good. But all these things are done to terrorize us, and the church does not pray publicly for one who has been excommunicated. Therefore a person suffers no more from this type of excommunication than a house or garment suffers if it is excommunicated. By the same token a person is not helped by absolution. But I will put an end to the refutation of such babbling contradictions, since nothing more is contained in them than scholastic opinions which are founded neither on the Scriptures, church fathers, nor church law. My opponent always begs the question or, if he does not do that, he rages like mad women with such words as: “He errs, he rages, he is insane, an error, to err.” He desires the sum total of his wisdom and knowledge to appear to consist of these words.

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.

This thesis is more a proof for the preceding thesis. It is certain that if the pope wishes to make an exception in cases of temporal necessity, he will make an even greater exception in the case of eternal necessity which one experiences through death. On the other hand, one who is sick or recognized by law as handicapped is bound only by a temporal impotence. And even if the pope makes no exception in the case of necessity, nevertheless it is understood that an exception is made in that case, since necessity knows no law. Death alone is the absolute necessity and the last and greatest hindrance of all.

10

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

1. This thesis is an obvious deduction of the eighth thesis. Certainly there must be many who wonder if the priests really do these things. To be sure they do. Since to do this is to place greater value upon obedience to the canons than obedience to the call of God and to prefer the cheap works of the canons to the most precious reward that Christians receive through death, I do not know whether those who hold such an opinion have the right type of faith.

2. It is well known and often repeated by most distinguished teachers in the church that if God should reveal his will to a person through a trance or some particular form of enlightenment at the moment that person is doing works of obedience to the church, then that individual is obligated to discontinue the work, relinquish obedience to the church, and “obey God rather than men” [Acts 5:29]. Indeed, our teachers say that in the canonical hours themselves one must violate the command of the church and turn aside from the usual words in the event that heavenly enlightenment or ecstasy should possess him. If, therefore, the laws of the church cease to apply in such divine summons, why should they not cease to apply in so great a summons and moment of rapture as that of death? Or perhaps one ought to follow that great multitude of lunatics who depend so much on their ceremonial works that, to satisfy these works, they often put off obvious obedience to God and men and really believe they have done rightly when they have observed ceremonial works only, and neglected obedience to God.

3. Surely the church would act wickedly if by its inferior jurisdiction it should retain one whom God already calls before his highest tribunal. When does the pope allow a defendant to be bound by the law and rules of the inferior jurisdiction of a bishop or prelate after he has been summoned to appear before his own jurisdiction? Or does he require something from his subordinates which he himself, being a man, does not concede to God who is his superior? Can man force the hand of God when one man cannot force the hand of another? Far be it. But surely if he imposes the punishments stipulated by canon law upon one who is about to die, it is evident that he judges and punishes that one according to his own jurisdiction.

Therefore there are almost twenty reasons which have caused me (I hope not arrogantly) to doubt this matter of canonical punishments. On the other hand, there is no authority to support it, either from canon law, reason, or the common practice of the church. The only support for it is the abuse of some individuals.

11

Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept [Matt. 13:25].

Here I ask that no one think I am slandering the most worthy bishops when I say that they were asleep. These are not my words but the words of the Gospel, only in the Gospel the word “men” is used instead of “bishops” [Matt. 13:25]. Yet it is certain that the word “men” referred to the superiors and leaders of the church, unless you take this word to refer to the rule of every person’s spirit and mind over his body. Therefore the popes of the church do not even teach that canonical punishments apply to purgatory, for, as I have said, there is no canon or statute from which it could be taught. Therefore certain canonists labor in vain if they try to point out by such means how many years and forty-days fasts must be spent in purgatory, since there are actually none, or at least it cannot be proved that there are any. The error consists in the fact that they do not regard the canons as given only for this life and binding upon earth, just as anyone who changes his residence from one city to another thereby also changes his citizenship. Before making the change he must make satisfaction for any debts he may have. Therefore, absolutely nothing should be imposed upon those about to die, nor should the dying be given up to purgatory while still in arrears with penances (as Gerson asserts in one place), but rather (as he teaches more correctly elsewhere), they should surrender to death with steadfastness and resignation according to God’s will.

At this point we must regard that fabrication and worthless sophistry of the indulgence sellers as an effort to frighten us in the same manner as men desire to frighten little children by the use of masks, namely, by saying that, since the priest does not know the amount of repentance required for absolution and thereby, perhaps, does not impose as great a satisfaction as divine justice requires, therefore this disparity must be satisfied either by a special work or by indulgences.

1. Consider how like oracles their empty words sound when they have no proof, even though the prophet says, “God utters no word without revealing his secret to his servants and the prophets” [Cf. Amos 3:7]. For it is incredible that this God of ours, who teaches us those things which are profitable for us, as he says through the prophet [Mic. 6:8], would nowhere have revealed this demand of his justice also.

2. I do not know whether or not those who speak in such a manner want to make God a usurer or dealer, one who remits nothing to us gratis but who expects us to make a satisfaction as payment for the remission. Or do these men desire, perhaps, that we should bargain with the justice of God regarding our sins, before which justice no man can be justified?

3. If the latter is the case, then why does the pope make full absolution, since he likewise does not know the amount of contrition necessary and is not able to make up the contrition that is lacking? Furthermore, perfect contrition does not need his absolution. Nor does he have power of another kind which is different from that of any other priest, but only of another degree. The pope remits everyone’s sins, other priests remit only the sins of some. The amount of

satisfaction they remit for some, he is able to remit for all, and nothing more than that, for otherwise the church would be some monster which consists of different types of power.

4. Furthermore, the early church did not know the amount of contrition necessary or the importance of personalities; nevertheless it gave plenary remission for sins after penance had been done, although, according to the opinions of these opponents of ours, the church could not know whether the penance was sufficient or not.

5. Another fantasy stems from the fact that our opponents base the remission of sins not upon faith and upon the word of the compassionate Christ, but upon the work of man who seeks and strives, for they imagine that plenary remission can only be given to those who have perfect contrition, which no one has in this life, yet they concede that plenary remission can be given by the pope, even to those who have imperfect contrition.

8. Whatever the justice of God requires is already beyond the jurisdiction of the church, which can change nothing that God wills or imposes. For that injunction still holds: "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose" [Isa. 46:10].

By the same token, that which others say is also disproved, namely, that canonical punishments are declarations of the punishments required by divine justice. In the first place there is no proof for this opinion. Therefore it may be condemned very easily. If God declares something, then it is impossible for the church to relax the same, since the church does not do the imposing but simply declares those things which have been imposed by God. Otherwise these men are compelled to say the word of Christ must be read in this way: "Whatever I shall have bound, you shall loose."

12

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

This twelfth thesis again proves the eighth, for canonical punishments are so temporal that they have absolution itself as their goal. However, since anyone who is about to die should be pardoned (other things being equal), it is evident that not only must no punishments be imposed, but also those which have been imposed, as well as those which should be imposed, must be remitted. And if the former custom of the church had been preserved, this error would not have arisen to the extent that it exists today. But now that absolution precedes punishments [satisfaction], it has developed that they disgrace absolution by sending people to death without absolution and thereby create a type of monstrosity, and at the same time they do not absolve by absolving and by the very same voice bind the one who is absolved.

1. This thesis is proved by that use of the solemn penance described in the canons, an example or remaining trace of which is still treated under the homicidal penance. Why do they, who are so strict with those who are on the verge of death, absolve him who lives from punishment and not direct him to perform other penances in life?

2. St. Jerome writes that his Fabiola is pardoned after satisfaction is made. In the same manner St. Ambrose pardons his Theodosius. Finally, one reads of this practice in no author more frequently than in the glorious martyr Cyprian, in the third book of his letters. The same thing is found in the *Ecclesiastical History* [of Eusebius]¹⁶ and the *Tripartite History* [of Cassiodorus].¹⁷ The status of penitents and demoniacs is likewise described by Dionysius in his work, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.¹⁸ In all these references we see that at that time sinners did not receive grace and absolution before penances were performed.

3. Christ did not pardon Mary Magdalene and the adulteress, until after they had shed tears, anointed him, and chastened themselves most ardently and humbly.

4. Thus we read in Genesis 44 that Joseph chastened his brothers with many tests in order to find out whether their affection for him and Benjamin was sincere, and after he was sure of this he made himself known to them and received them graciously.

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.

This thesis sums up that which has been said previously and is clear enough. It would be a very strange thing, if one who is about to die is released from all works and laws, from responsibility to men, even from those laws of God himself, especially where almsgiving, prayer, fasting, a cross, work, and whatever can be performed by the body are demanded. And finally, it would be very strange if one who is about to die is released from the works of holy love toward his neighbor (a love which in itself never dies), only to be confronted with requirements of the canons from which he cannot be released. Then the Christian would be even more miserable than all the heathen, because the laws of living torment him even in death, while, as a matter of fact, he is of such a nature that, even though dead he ought to be free through Christ in whom he lives.

Now, finally, let us draw together our conclusions to discover how many men there are whose punishments are remitted through indulgences. Six types of men seem to me to be excepted, because they need no indulgences: first, the dead or those about to die, second, the sick, third, those who have lawful hindrances, fourth, those who have not committed crimes, fifth, those who have not committed public crimes, sixth, those who mend their ways. We shall prove that these need no indulgences and at least make our reasons plausible.

1. The first proof is that which perhaps has the greatest offense, namely, that indulgences are necessary only for public crimes such as adultery, homicide, usury, fornication, drunkenness, rebellion, etc. If such sins were kept secret, the canons would not appear to apply to them. First, because the canons establish public penances and the church has no authority to judge publicly concerning secret things. Second, because just as a secret sin ought not to be punished publicly, so it does not need to be remitted publicly. Yet indulgences are public remissions and take place in the presence of the congregation, as is evident. Indeed there are some who think there is a distinction between indulgences by public bulls and those given privately under the judgment of conscience. Third, the church is offended, not by secret sins, but only by public ones. Therefore, they who sin in secret are not required to make amends for offenses committed and thus to rebuild that which has been destroyed. Fourth, at the present time the jurists do not condemn criminals publicly unless they have been recognized as such by law, while on the other hand they tolerate those who are recognized as criminals by deed. I certainly do not condemn their opinion, nor does it appear to me to be erroneous, since it gives no one the right to judge, condemn, or despise another regardless of how great a sinner he may be, unless he has the authority to judge him, lest it be said of him, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another" [Rom. 14:4]. Nevertheless, prelates must be blamed as much as subordinates for the neglect of love, since they permit those who are recognized as criminals by deed to act freely and do not care whether they become recognized as such by law, in spite of that command of Christ, "Tell it to the church; if he refuses to listen even to the church, etc." [Matt. 18:17].

2. I believe it is evident to everyone that canonical punishments are imposed only for crimes. Therefore indulgences (if they are remissions of the canons) apply only to criminals. So those who lead an ordinary life, which is not done without venial sins, have no need of indulgences, especially since no punishment may be imposed for venial sins; nor is there any obligation even to confess these sins. It is even less necessary for those who lead an ordinary life to purchase indulgences. Otherwise, canonical punishments would have to be borne by everyone at every moment, since no one, as I have said before, lives without committing venial sins. I add further that it is not necessary to purchase indulgences for every mortal sin and I prove that in this manner: No one is sure that he does not always sin mortally because of the most secret vice of pride. If, therefore, canonical punishments should apply to every mortal sin, then the whole life of the faithful, over and beyond the cross referred to in the gospel, would be nothing more than a torture chamber of canonical punishments. Therefore one must continually purchase indulgences and do nothing else. But if this seems absurd, it is clear that indulgences apply only to sins punished by the canons. Yet no sins can be punished by the canons except those which are certain and public crimes, or if I should be urged to go further, at least those which one is sure are crimes, as I have said about adultery, theft, homicide, etc., that is, deeds which are recognized as such publicly. Therefore consent to any mortal sin is not included in canonical punishment, either to be imposed or remitted. A sin committed by word of mouth is also not included, unless it becomes the occasion for a future deed, as is also clear from the words of the canons.

3. The canons are imposed for crimes in such a way that punishments cease if one mends his ways, for example, if he enters a monastery or devotes himself to the service of the poor and the sick, or if he suffers for Christ's sake or dies according to the will of God, or if he does something similar to or greater than these things. In these cases it is clear that canonical punishments do cease, and indulgences have no value for them. Hence punishments are imposed only upon those who are lazy and who are indifferent toward penances, that is, those sinners who are spoiled by indulgences. Therefore indulgences appear to be granted especially and only to those whose hearts are hardened and to those who are without feeling.

4. It is to be understood, without any doubt, that punishments are not imposed upon those who are hindered, for a very just reason, from being able to bear the punishments, for example, if one were captured by the Turks or unbelievers, or if he is the slave of some master to whom he is constrained to give obedience according to the precept of the gospel, or even to perform services which he ought to perform to serve his wife and children by working with his hands and gaining a livelihood. Whoever is hindered by such things is not obligated to give them up, rather he is not only obligated to do them but also to ignore the canons and obey God. Therefore the person who is thus hindered has no need of the remissions of those things which he was incapable of having imposed upon him.

5. The canons impose nothing upon the sick; therefore the only one in question is the one who is healthy and who is not numbered among those who say, "The hand of God has touched me" [Job 19:21]. These sick people do not deserve to have punishments imposed upon them but rather to be visited and to receive comfort, according to that word of Christ, "I was..sick..and you did not visit me" [Matt. 25:43]. Moreover, it will be said to the popes, "For they persecute him

whom thou hast smitten, and they have added to the pain of my wounds” [Cf. Ps. 69:26], and according to that word of Job, “Why do you, like God, pursue me?” [Job 19:22]. Therefore indulgences are not necessary for these people.

6. What is true concerning the sick is also true concerning the dead and those who are about to die, of whom I have already spoken.

You see, therefore, how many Christians there are for whom indulgences are neither necessary nor useful. But I will return to this thesis in order to bring this matter to a conclusion and to stab them with their own sword.

It is maintained by everyone in the church that in the agony and moment of death every priest is a pope and therefore remits everything for the one who is about to die. And if the priest is absent, certainly the longing of the dying man for the priest is sufficient. For this reason, since the dying man is pardoned for everything which can be pardoned by the pope, the indulgences for the dead seem to confer absolutely nothing, for whatever can be loosed is loosed by death. From this it is likewise evident that the distinction in gradations and laws is to be understood as applying only to the living and those who are in good health. Therefore indulgences evidently apply only to criminals and to the living who are healthy and strong, who have no hindrances and who have no desire to mend their ways. If I am wrong in this, let him correct me, whoever is able and knows.

One might ask, however, “From which punishments, then, are souls released, or what punishments do they suffer in purgatory if they do not suffer anything which is included in the canonical law?” My response is, If I knew the answer to that, why would I need to discuss it or ask about it? I am not experienced enough to know what God does with souls who have departed, at least not as experienced as those innumerable redeemers of souls who make such sure pronouncements about everything as though it were impossible for them to be mere men. Added to this difficulty is the fact that there are teachers who think that souls suffer nothing from the fire but only in the fire, so that the fire is not a tormentor but only the prison of souls. Therefore I am dealing here with a matter that is especially doubtful and debatable, and I offer what I have observed about these things.

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.

This is particularly pointed out by that passage in I John 4[:18]: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment.” Therefore if perfect love casts out fear, then of necessity a love which is not perfect does not cast out fear, and in this way fear remains in imperfect love. But where would one find that perfect love? And (to digress a little) what man is there who has no fear of death, judgment, or hell? For in every man, no matter how holy he may be, there are the remains of the old man, and of sin, and the vestige of the former Adam remains, just as the children of Israel in their day were not able to erase entirely the influence of the Jebusites, the Canaanites, and the rest of the heathen. Moreover, this old man consists of error, concupiscence, wrath, fear, apprehension, despair, evil conscience, horror of death, etc. Those are characteristics of the old, carnal man. They diminish, however, in the new man, but they are not extinguished until he himself is extinguished by death, just as the Apostle says, “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day” [II Cor. 4:16]. Therefore these evil remains of the old man are not removed by indulgences or by contrition which has begun to take place in a person. Rather the process of removal has begun, and as a person increases in spiritual health these evils are removed. This spiritual health is nothing more than faith in or love in Christ.

Having made that statement, the thesis is clear enough. If anyone is snatched away by death before he has attained that perfect love which drives out fear, he necessarily dies in fear and trembling until love is perfected and able to cast out fear. This fear which I mention is that conscience which is evil and disturbed because of a weak point in faith. As the Apostle says, the blood of Christ frees our consciences from dead works [Heb. 9:14]. And also in Heb. 10[:22] we read, “Our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience in the full assurance of faith.”

Briefly, if I can prove that the reason for dread and fear is distrust, and that the reason for assurance, on the other hand, is faith, I believe it has been proved at the same time that the person who dies with an imperfect faith necessarily fears and trembles. Furthermore, distrust is often referred to in the gospel as the reason for terror, despair, and condemnation. In the first place this becomes clear on the occasion when Peter commanded the Lord to depart from him, saying, “for I am a sinful man” [Luke 5:8]. The second case in point is given when Peter began to sink because of his little faith [Matt. 14:30]. A third instance is referred to when the disciples wanted to cry out in dismay when they thought Christ was a ghost walking on the sea [Matt. 14:26]. And a fourth occurrence is referred to when the distraught disciples thought they saw a spirit as Christ entered their midst through the closed doors [Luke 24:37]. In all these cases distrust is portrayed as the reason for fear and dread. Therefore all fear and trembling arises from distrust, every feeling of assurance

arises from faith in God. Faith, however, arises out of love, since the person must be like the one in whom he puts his trust.

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 the horror of despair.

I say nothing about the fire and place of purgatory, not because I deny them, but because that discussion is another one which I do not undertake to bring up at this time. Furthermore I do not know where the place of purgatory is, even though St. Thomas thinks it is beneath the earth. Meanwhile, I remain in agreement with St. Augustine, namely, in the belief that the places of refuge for souls are hidden and so obscure that we know nothing about them. I mention these things in order that the Picard heretic¹⁹ may not appear to have drawn from my statement that there is no purgatory because I confess that its location is unknown, or that the Roman church errs because it does not reject the opinion of St. Thomas. I am positive that there is a purgatory, and it does not bother me much what the heretics babble, for St. Augustine, more than eleven hundred years ago, in the ninth book, thirteenth chapter, of his Confessions,²⁰ prayed for his mother and father and requested that intercession be made for them. And when that same saintly mother of his was dying (as he records), she wanted him to remember her at the altar of the Lord, although, as St. Augustine relates, this was done by St. Ambrose. But even if there had been no purgatory at the time of the apostles (as the disgusting Picard prides himself in), must, therefore, any credence be given a heretic who was born scarcely fifty years ago? And must it be contended that the faith of so many centuries has been false, Especially since the Picard does nothing more than say, "I do not believe it," and by that means assumes that he has proved all his assertions and condemned all of ours, as though sticks and stones believe? But these matters pertain to his own work and time.

Therefore it has been conceded that souls feel dread. Now I shall prove that such dread is a punishment of purgatory, indeed the greatest punishment.

1. Everyone concedes that the punishments of purgatory and of hell are the same except that they differ in the fact that the latter is for eternity. But Scripture describes the punishments of hell as fear, trembling, dread, and flight, as it says in Ps. 1[:4], "The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away." And also in Job, Isaiah, and many other places, the wicked are compared to the rubble and chaff which is snatched up and scattered by the whirlwind, a figure of speech which Scripture uses to be sure to symbolize the horrible flight of the damned. The same thought is found in Ps. 2[:5]: "Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury." And in Isa. 28[:16] we read, "He who believes in him will not be confounded," that is, will not hasten away, will not tremble, will not flee like one who is confused and disturbed; at any rate the prophet wishes to say that non-believers, will be confounded and will tremble. Proverbs 1[:33] says: "He who listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of evil." And Psalm 111 [112:7] says: "He will not be afraid of evil tidings:" In these and in other places in Scripture terror, dread, trembling, fear, and quaking are expressed as the punishment of the wicked, while Scripture asserts the opposite of these for the godly. Finally, St. James says that "even the demons believe—and shudder" [Jas. 2:19]. And Deut. 28[:65] clearly states that the punishment of the wicked is trembling, when it says, "The Lord will give you there a trembling heart." If there were no trembling, neither death nor hell nor any punishment would be troublesome, as we read in the Song of Solomon [8:6], "For love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as hell." This fact was adequately proved by the martyrs, as the Holy Spirit says about the wicked in Ps. 13[:5], "There they trembled with fear" (Cf. Ps. 14:5), where there was no fear, and in Proverbs 28, "The wicked flees when no one pursues, but the righteous, bold as a lion, shall be free from terror" [Cf. Prov. 28:1]. Otherwise, why is it that one person fears death and grieves over it, while another regards it lightly, if it were not for the fact that the one who is inwardly lacking in faith in the righteousness [of God] is afraid exactly at the point where he should not be afraid?

2. In the next place, II Thess. 1[:8-9] states, "Those who do not believe the gospel, will suffer the punishments of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." By the strength of his might alone God tortures and afflicts those to whom he is intolerable. Therefore the wicked shall flee and not escape, but shall be seized with anxiety. As that passage in the Book of Wisdom says, "It shall soon appear dreadful to you" [Wis. of Sol. 6:6]. And in Ps. 20 [Ps. 21:9] we read, "You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear." Otherwise, whence came that voice, "O mountains, fall upon us, and hills, cover us" [Hos. 10:8], and that passage in Isa. 2[:10], "Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty," or that passage in Job, "Oh that thou wouldest hide me in Sheol, that thou wouldest be confounded and will tremble. Proverbs 1[:33] says: "He that the greatest punishment for the wicked consists in being in the presence of the Lord, where they are put to shame because their most foul impurity stands in sharp contrast to such sublime purity. 3. Moreover, the church, in behalf of souls, sings and groans, as in Ps. 6[:2-3], "My bones are troubled, my soul also is sorely troubled." And Ps. 114 [Cf. Ps.

116:3] says, “The sorrows of death encompassed me and the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me.” There fore the most common prayer we make for these wicked people is the desire that they may have rest, particularly since we know that they are restless. However, it is not the punishments which produce the restlessness, as is evident from the martyrs and from those men who have been steadfast, but rather the dread of and the flight from punishments, both of which arise from frailty of trust in God. As a person believes, so it will be with him; and as he himself is, so punishments and all things will be to him. Therefore whatever may happen to the righteous man does not disturb him, as Proverbs states [Prov. 12:21]. On the other hand, the sound of a driven leaf terrifies the wicked [Lev. 26:36]. And in Isa. 57[:20-21] we read, “The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up dirt and mire. There is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord God.”

4. Some individuals have tasted these punishments in this life, especially those of hell. Therefore we must believe even more that they are imposed upon the dead in purgatory. For David, a man of experience, said, “If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would soon have dwelt in hell” [Ps. 94:17]. And elsewhere he says, “My soul is full of troubles and my life has drawn near to Sheol” [Ps. 88:3]. And again he says, “Our bones are scattered at the mouth of Sheol” [Ps. 141:7], and “I become like those who go down to the Pit” [Ps. 28:1]. And again David says, “How many great and evil tribulations hast thou shown me, and then led me back again from the depths of the earth” [Ps. 71:20]. Indeed Hezekiah says, “I said, ‘in the noontide of my days I must depart . . . to the gates of Sheol” [Isa. 38:10]. And further on he says: “Like a lion he breaks all my bones” [Isa. 38:13], which surely cannot be understood in any other way except as an occurrence of unbearable horror.

5. How many there are even today who taste those punishments! For what else does John Tauler teach in his German sermons than the sufferings of these punishments of which he also cites some examples?²¹ Indeed, I know that this teacher is unknown to the schools of theologians and is probably despised by them; but even though he has written entirely in the German vernacular, I have found in him more solid and sincere theology than is found in all the scholastic teachers of all the universities or than can be found in their propositions.

I myself “knew a man” [II Cor. 12:2] who claimed that he had often suffered these punishments, in fact over a very brief period of time. Yet they were so great and so much like hell that no tongue could adequately express them, no pen could describe them, and one who had not himself experienced them could not believe them. And so great were they that, if they had been sustained or had lasted for half an hour, even for one tenth of an hour, he would have perished completely and all of his bones would have been reduced to ashes. At such a time God seems terribly angry, and with him the whole creation. At such a time there is no flight, no comfort, within or without, but all things accuse. At such a time as that the Psalmist mourns, “I am cut off from thy sight” [Cf. Ps. 31:22], or at least he does not dare to say, “O Lord, . . . do not chasten me in thy wrath” [Ps. 6:1]. In this moment (strange to say) the soul cannot believe that it can ever be redeemed other than that the punishment is not yet completely felt. Yet the soul is eternal and is not able to think of itself as being temporal. All that remains is the stark-naked desire for help and a terrible groaning, but it does not know where to turn for help. In this instance the person is stretched out with Christ so that all his bones may be counted, and every corner of the soul is filled with the greatest bitterness, dread, trembling, and sorrow in such a manner that all these last forever.

To use an example: If a ball crosses a straight line, any point of the line which is touched bears the whole weight of the ball, yet it does not embrace the whole ball. Just so the soul, at the point where it is touched by a passing eternal flood, feels and imbibes nothing except eternal punishment. Yet the punishment does not remain, for it passes over again. Therefore if that punishment of hell, that is, that unbearable and inconsolable trembling, takes hold of the living, punishment of the souls in purgatory seems to be so much greater. Moreover, that punishment for them is constant. And in this instance the inner fire is much more terrible than the outer fire. If there is anyone who does not believe that, we do not beg him to do so, but we have merely proved that these preachers of indulgences speak with too much audacity about many things of which they know nothing or else doubt. For one ought to believe those who are experienced in these matters rather than those who are inexperienced.

6. In addition to this there is the authority of the church, which chants, “Free them from the lion’s mouth, lest hell engulf them”²² [Ps. 22:21], as well as the words, “from the gate of hell.”²³ These words certainly appear to indicate that souls are, as it were, already at the gate, at the threshold of condemnation and at the entrance of hell, which, as I have said, is near despair. And I do not believe the words of the church are empty words.

16

Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.

Whoever shall have accepted the two preceding theses as true, easily admits this one also. Indeed, since we believe that peace, joy, and confidence reign in heaven in the light of God, we also believe that in hell despair, grief, and terrible flight rage²⁴ in the realms of outer darkness. It is clear that purgatory is the middle between both extremes, in such

a way, however, that it is nearer hell than heaven, for in purgatory there is a despair, a longing to escape, dread, and grief. Souls in purgatory have no joy or peace, in fact they share nothing from heaven, since the punishment of purgatory is considered the same as that of hell, differing only in duration. But in speaking of despair I have added, "hear despair," for that type of despair finally comes to an end. Moreover, the soul, as long as it is in purgatory, feels nothing but despair, not because it despairs, but because it is so disturbed and perplexed with anxiety that it does not feel capable of hope. The Spirit alone helps them in their weakness [Rom. 8:26], as much as it is possible, by interceding for them in groans that are too deep for words. So those who have such temptations in this life do not know whether to hope or despair. Indeed, they appear to despair with only a groan for help remaining. By this sign, others, but not they, know that they still have hope. But I am not going to speak more extensively about this matter which is really most abstruse, lest the indulgence hawkers throw up to me the fact that I speak without proof, although, unlike them, I do not assert that which I know nothing about, but discuss, question, and contend that their presumptuous assurance is of a doubtful quality, indeed worthless.

17

It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.

This thesis is dependent upon the three preceding theses. Nevertheless, we shall explain this thesis and propose (as we started to do) three types of dying souls.

1. The first type consists of those who have no faith at all (that is, those who are condemned). These individuals must face death with the greatest dread and despair, according to that passage of Scripture which says, "Let evil take hold of the godless in death" [Ps. 140:11]. And also, "The death of sinners is the worst of all" [Ps. 34:22], for since they have no faith in God, the wrath of God lays hold of them.

The second type consists of those who have complete faith and are perfect (that is, those who are blessed). These individuals must face death with the utmost confidence and joy, according to the Scripture which says, "Although the righteous fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord is the stay of his hand" [Ps. 37:24]. And also, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" [Ps. 116:15], and again, "If the just man shall be snatched by death, he shall be at rest" [Wis. of Sol. 4:7]. Both the just and the unjust have found a reason for death. The unjust man finds that which he feared, namely death and punishment. Moreover, he has always feared them. The just man, on the other hand, who is tired of this life, desires especially to be released, and so his desire is granted to him. The former has not lived out half his days [Ps. 55:23], the latter has prolonged the time of his dwelling in the body beyond his appointed goal. Therefore what the former dreads, the latter longs for. And since each of them is motivated by an entirely different desire, what is to the former the greatest dread is to the latter the highest gain and joy.

The third type of souls who are dying consists of those whose faith is imperfect, ranging anywhere from complete faith to no faith at all. I do not believe anyone denies that some people die with a faith that is imperfect; but we shall prove that point more fully a little later. Therefore, since imperfection of faith is nothing more than imperfect newness of life in the spirit and still a remnant of the old flesh and the old Adam (for if faith were perfect it would not fear punishment, face death reluctantly, or depart with earthly affection for this life), it seems clear that souls must not only remove the punishments, but also add the perfection of a new life and remove the remains of the old (that is, the love of this life and the fear of death and judgment). However much the punishment might be removed (if that were possible), the soul would not thereby be healthy simply because of its removal. In the same manner a person does not become better in this life simply by taking away punishments, but also by adding grace and removing sin. Therefore, before everything else, sin must be removed, that is, the imperfection in faith, hope, and love.

2. No punishment is overcome by running away or by fear. For the proverb is true which says, "He who is afraid of hell, goes there." Indeed, if one is afraid of the hoarfrost, the snow will fall upon him (Job 6[:16]); that is, more will fall upon him than he feared. Every punishment is increased and strengthened by the fear of it, and by the same token, it is diminished and weakened by love. Moreover, punishment is overcome by love and affection for it; for no punishment is grievous as long as it has been overcome. Therefore to him who loves punishments and death they are not grievous but sweet, because they have been overcome by love and the Spirit. On the other hand, to him who is afraid, they are grievous, because they are dominated by fear and the letter of the law. Therefore, if purgatory afflicts a soul and anxiety is a burden to him, it is clear that he lacks love and the spirit of freedom, and the letter and fear are present. I call this defect of love an imperfect spiritual health. Moreover, since no one shall enter heaven without perfect spiritual health, I conclude that for him love and health must be increased, just as dread must be decreased.

3. If anyone should deny these things or disbelieve them and should maintain that souls are perfected in spiritual life there [purgatory] and only pay previous debts of punishments, I answer first that those individuals should prove their opinion which I myself deny. I am positive that they shall prove their opinions either with no reasons at all or else with very weak ones. Now then, secondly, I ask whether they deny that three-fold division of dying souls mentioned above. If

they admit the third type, they should explain with respect to what has been said previously, how timidity of spirit and fear is removed, since the perfect man, like his Father, God, fears nothing, can do all things, bears all things, rejoices and delights in all things. If they do not admit this third type, but think that faith is made perfect in death, that only the punishments remain to be paid, and that purgatory is only the reckoning of accounts of punishments which are due, then I shall proceed still further, in a persuasive manner, beyond that very strong and irrefutable argument which I have already advanced, namely, that they cannot prove their opinion by any passage of Scripture or by any rational argument. For this is what those conjecturers do, as well as those who follow blindly after them.

First of all, why does God want those who are perfect in spirit to be punished? Is it for satisfaction? Quite the contrary; beyond all satisfaction is the satisfaction of love, for by means of punishment God himself requires nothing else except that love should be perfected. For, unless the Apostle lies, "love covers a multitude of sins" [I Pet. 4:8]. But it has been established that the love these individuals have is perfect.

Second, where one is lacking in ability, satisfaction is made to God especially through the will, as the whole church believes along with St. Augustine. But if these individuals have perfect love, of necessity they possess such a will, and yet they do not have the ability with a life that is defective. Therefore, of necessity they make adequate satisfaction by the will alone.

Third, they who are perfect return to God whatever they owe, because they owe nothing more than the offering of their total selves along with their inmost will. God requires of man nothing more than his total self, as he says: "My son, give me your heart" [Prov. 23:26]. Indeed, through punishment he compels man to offer his whole self. In what way, then, do punishments remain after this has been done? For what purpose do they compel?

4. Consider, for example, a soul with perfect faith and love in the hour of death, which may still be obliged to keep a seven-day fast or satisfy some other canonical punishment. Is God so cruel that the soul which thirsts for him with the greatest love, and loves him most fervently above everything else, which has fully forgiven its neighbor all things, and desires most fervently that it itself may be forgiven all things, which because of these things has deserved forgiveness before God and men (for such is the soul of one who dies with pure love), here, I say, is God so cruel that he does not remit those seven days for the sake of the greatest love and humility toward Him and his neighbor, which is the greatest charity of all?

And yet this is the same God who says in the gospel to those who give alms not from the heart but from the abundance of the things which they possess that all things are remitted and cleansed [Luke 11:41], and who freely forgave the whole debt to the servant who did nothing but ask and promise [Matt. 18:23-28]. Does not God consider at all that it is so easy to grant such things to those who are living and in no danger of dying; and should it be so difficult to remit such little sins in exchange for so great a love to those who are about to die and are already burdened with the greatest danger of death? Who will believe that? Or how will they convince us of that? Therefore, either they should cease preaching their doctrines so confidently or else give better support for them and refute those which I have advanced. Meanwhile we shall conclude that the souls in purgatory labor on in punishment, not for the sake of punishment alone but because of a defect in love, since they had no desire to work towards perfection here on earth; or else, if they are perfect, we shall conclude that they are free, since all punishments are overcome by love.

It is not my understanding of the goodness of God that, in view of perfect and eternal love, he shall remit to certain individuals punishment of the shortest duration, when he, on the basis of very little love, at times remits eternal punishment to all. Furthermore, it is not my understanding that God, who often forgives all punishments in this life for the sake of one work of beginning love, shall never remit in death some punishments for the sake of every work of perfect love. I have, nevertheless, debated these matters because "God is marvelous in his sanctuary" [Ps. 68:35]. We would do better to leave such doubtful matters alone and teach people other things which are more certain. God is able to deal with them, not because of this or that opinion – for they have not been subjected to our judgment but to his – but because he is able and free to punish them there in order that he may show the glory of his grace, just as he did to Job and Paul.

5. Nevertheless, I speak in favor of this thesis for a fifth reason. If purgatory is only a workshop of punishment, why not call it "punitory" rather than purgatory? For the meaning and force of the term "purgatory" imply a cleansing which can only be understood as pertaining to the remains of the old nature and sin, because of which those persons are unclean who in their affection for earthly things have hindered the purity of faith. But if by the use of a new ambiguity (for they are prompted to make distinctions) they shall say that cleansing here is the same as payment, so that then they are said to be cleansed when the punishments have been paid, I answer: It is refuted as easily as it is proved. But if they shall also despise the idea that the meaning of the term includes the cleansing of faults, let it be so. I do not dispute it. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that both meanings are doubtful. For that reason the first meaning has been scattered abroad among the people in a distorted manner and with the greatest of certainty, especially since the basic meaning of the term does not agree with their opinion.

6. The remark of Gregory I [d. 604] in the *Decretals* (dist. XXV), in the chapter called *Qualis*,²⁵ also supports this thesis. There he says that not only punishments, but guilt, are remitted in the future life, that is, venial sins, as he points out by examples in that text. But the remission of guilt does not take place without the infusion of grace, and the dread of death is for saints a venial sin but not a small one.

18

Furthermore, it does not seem proved, either by reason or Scripture, that souls in purgatory are outside the state of merit, that is, unable to grow in love.

1. This is my strongest argument against the opinion for which I am reproached and which is taught without authority. Moreover, our opinion rests securely upon that authority which says that without the adding of grace no fear is dispelled, for perfect love alone casts out fear [I John 4:18]. Moreover, this thesis anticipates the argument of those who will say against me, “They are no longer able to earn merit, therefore the three preceding theses are false.”

However, to continue with my opinion and disputation without asserting anything absolutely, as I started to do, I say if purgatory is only a workshop for paying punishments and souls are there because of their affection for that which is unclean (as I myself feel) and are not cleansed of that evil, then purgatory would become the same as hell, where punishment obtains and guilt remains. For the souls in purgatory there is guilt, namely, the fear of punishment and the lack of love, while, according to Isa. 8[:13], the righteous man should fear nothing except God alone. Therefore they sin continuously as long as they dread punishments and seek rest. I prove this by the fact that they seek what is their own more than the will of God, which is contrary to love. But if they do love God, they love with the love of concupiscence (that is, with a faulty love), although even in the midst of their punishments they should please and glorify God and endure them steadfastly. And in order to assert something, even among so many thorny problems of this disputation, I confess freely that I don’t believe anyone is redeemed from the punishments of purgatory on account of fear, until, having laid fear aside he begins to love the will of God in such punishment and loves the will of God more than he fears punishment – indeed loves the will of God alone and despises the punishment or even loves it as God’s will. For he must love righteousness before he is saved.

But the righteousness is God who administers this punishment. Hence that statement of Christ, “He who does not take his cross (that is, bearing it willingly and lovingly) and follow me is not worthy of me” [Matt. 10:38]. But that punishment is the cross of souls. Since these things are so, and I believe they are absolutely true, let anyone who is able tell me how the love of punishment can take the place of fear without the infusion of a new grace. I confess that I do not know, unless you should say, contrary to what was said previously, that purgatory does not contain any dread of punishment, and for that reason is not similar to hell. In that case we pray in vain for those who, we understand, look forward to and love their punishments without any fear at all.

2. I prove that the souls in purgatory grow in love. The Apostle says, “To those who love God all things work for good” [Rom 8:28]. This good can only be understood as the increase of the good which one already possesses. Therefore purgatory also increases that good which is love for God, indeed, increases that most of all. And just as ‘jealousy is cruel as the grave’ [Song of Sol. 8:6] and takes delight in such great evils, and just as the furnace proves gold to be gold [Prow. 27:21], just so punishment proves love to be love.

3. Strength is made perfect in weakness [II Cor. 12:9]. If love is present, every punishment is salutary and beneficial; for the most precious and most fruitful love does not permit anything in itself to be worthless. Since the greatest weakness exists in purgatory, therefore purgatory perfects love most of all.

4. It is impossible to stand still in the way of God. Moreover, the way of God is love reaching out towards God. Therefore it is evident that souls must either advance toward or fall away from the love of God, since they have not yet reached the end or seen God.

5. It is impossible for a created thing to persevere unless it continually receives more and more strength. For that reason certain thinkers say that the preservation of a thing is its continued creation. But to create is always to make new, which is clear even in brooks, rays, heat, and cold, especially when they are beyond their source. Therefore also in the case of spiritual warmth, that is, the love for God, souls must continually be preserved (until they become absorbed into their divine source) and, by the same token, necessarily grow, even if they perchance have been perfected, although to be outside of God and not to have attained to him and to have been perfected are ideas opposed to each other.

But it is worth while to see what moves my opponents to deny that souls may earn merit or what moves them to prove that it must be denied.

The first reason is that very well-known saying of St. Augustine: “All merit is acquired in this life; after death no merit is acquired.”²⁶ Therefore, they say, purgatory is not a place for gaining merit.

My answer is this: St. Augustine and all other fathers who have spoken in a similar manner speak from the authority and by the use of Scripture, which speaks much more strongly in favor of this opinion. For example, that passage in the sixth chapter [:10] of Galatians: “As we have opportunity, let us do good.” And Christ says in John 9[:4]: “Night comes when no one can work.” And the Apostle says: “For their deeds follow them” [Rev. 14:13]; and that particularly clear reference in Heb. 9[:27] says: “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment,” then the end. Galatians 6[:7] says: “For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Likewise: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body” [II Cor. 5:10]. And there are many other passages which together make it appear as if, after death, there is a judgment according to which each one will receive in proportion as one has done, that is, deserved in this life, according to that passage in Ecclesiastes: “In the place where the tree falls, there it will lie” [Eccles. 11:3].

All these passages in like manner militate against the whole idea of purgatory because they do not establish an intermediary state between the dead who have been condemned and those who are saved. Therefore if purgatory is justly defended in spite of those things, it can also be defended that grace is increased in the souls in purgatory, notwithstanding that which is said, namely, that all merit is acquired in this life. Nothing is said about purgatory, just as the passages cited also say nothing about purgatory but speak only of heaven and hell. So neither side refers to purgatory. Therefore those words of Augustine must not be understood as applying to purgatory. All merit is obtained in this life and not beyond this life, that is, not in heaven or hell. Finally, according to St. Augustine also, the merit by which a man is worthy of being helped by intercession in purgatory is acquired in this life. Otherwise he possesses no merit either in heaven or hell by which he deserves to be helped. There, at least, he has respect for purgatory, here on earth he has none at all.

However, if a more obstinate person should wish to maintain that the authorities already cited do not deny purgatory in any way and that souls can be saved by holding to a doctrine of a two-fold judgment or two-fold retribution after death, namely, a temporal retribution, which is purgatory, and an eternal retribution, which is hell, and thus one reaps purgatory, the other hell, and likewise the works of one man follow him to purgatory, the other to hell; if anyone should maintain this, I answer that, by speaking in such a manner, that is, through such a detestable and arbitrary ambiguity, those authorities are destroyed along with purgatory rather than preserved, since the other side of that ambiguity can never be proved. In my judgment, it is unlawful and an exceedingly wicked use of a practice that has been preserved by some up to the present time, namely, that of dividing the simple meaning of Holy Scripture into an ambiguous and doubtful meaning. For it is better to state that this authority says nothing at all about this matter, than, in seeking to understand it in both connections, to give the impression that it is by no means reliable. “A short covering cannot cover both,” says Isaiah [Isa. 28:20], and, as the saying goes, “One altar must not be adorned by laying bare another.” Therefore, it should be said that the statement, “a man reaps there what he has sown here,” refers to the present and the future life. For the word “reap” must be kept free from the distortion and double meaning of our own judgment and retain the same meaning in which it is used in Scripture, namely, as referring to a future and universal judgment. Therefore those authorities do not fight against purgatory at all, nor do they deal with it by the sophistry of double meaning, but they deal with it only in the sense of ignoring it. By the same token they also say, “Here every merit, there none.” Moreover, how great an effort would it have been for me also to say that merit has a double meaning, namely, that after death no merit achieved in this world is valid, but only the merit obtained in that circumstance, and that Augustine speaks of the first! But I had no desire to do so.

What, moreover, do they say about that passage in Ecclesiastes: “Wherever the tree falls either to the north or to the south, .. there it will lie” [Eccles. 11:3], if indeed they understand the word “fall” to mean death? Therefore, if by north is meant hell and by south is meant heaven, in which direction do those who enter purgatory fall? “To the south,” they say, but they speak ambiguously. But what do they say about the words, “There it will lie?” Do they mean, “There it will remain?” Will they, therefore, never leave purgatory? In this respect the “remaining” is also ambiguous; namely, is it temporal or eternal?

It is evident, therefore, that this authority is directly opposed to purgatory, indeed by his ambiguity it makes a hell out of purgatory. Therefore, the matter cannot be solved except by saying (as I have already said) that that passage has nothing more to say about purgatory than the phrase: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” [Matt. 1:1].

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.

We ourselves, because we believe that no man goes to purgatory unless he belongs to the number of those who must be saved, are certain about the salvation of those in purgatory just as we are certain about the salvation of the elect. Although I do not object too much if anyone should assert that they are certain of their salvation, I myself do not say that

all are certain. But since every matter concerning the souls in purgatory is most obscure, I support this thesis by persuasion rather than by proof.

1. My thesis holds true, first, according to what has been said above, if the punishment of purgatory consists of trembling and dread of condemnation and hell, and every trembling causes the soul to be distressed, uncertain, in need of counsel and help, and that so much more when that trembling and dread is most violent and unexpected. Moreover, it is the strongest and most unexpected trembling for every soul, as I have said before and as Christ says, "That day will come upon you suddenly like a snare" [Luke 21:34]. The Apostle says, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" [I Thess. 5:2; II Pet. 3:10].

Because of their confusion they probably do not know whether they are damned or saved; indeed they may seem to be already on the way to condemnation and descending to the pit, and, to be sure, even now at the gates of hell, just as Hezekiah says [Isa. 38:10-20]. But I Sam. 2[:6] also says, "The Lord brings down to hell and raises up." Therefore they feel only that their condemnation has just begun, except that they feel that the gate of hell is not yet closed behind them. And they do not give up that longing and desire for help although it is never apparent to them. That's what those who have experienced it say. To explain: If anyone should come unexpectedly to the judgment of death, if for example, he should fall into the hands of highwaymen who, while they threaten in every respect to kill him, even though they have decided only to frighten rather than kill him, then these are certain that he will prevail. The man himself sees nothing except the very presence of death and by that very fact already dies. The only hope he has is the fact that he is not yet dead and can be saved from death, although he does not know from what quarter that help will come (for he sees that they could but do not want to kill him).

Therefore his condition differs very little from death itself. Such seems to be the case in the dread of eternal death, for men feel that they are threatened in every respect with nothing else than eternal death. So the church sings in their behalf, "Deliver their souls from the gate of hell," and "Free them from the lion's mouth, lest hell engulf them." They have only that remnant of knowledge which tells them that God can redeem them, but it seems to them he does not want to. Thereupon the condemned immediately add to this evil of doubt that of blasphemy, but, sustained by the Spirit, they add only their complaint and indescribable groaning [Rom. 8:26]. For here the Spirit moves over the waters where darkness is upon the face of the deep [Gen. 1:2]. But concerning this I have spoken more fully on a previous occasion.

2. Records of many examples claim that some souls have confessed this uncertainty of their position, for they have appeared, so to speak, going to the judgment to which they have been called, as St. Vincent and others testify.²⁷ On the other hand, many examples are recorded in which they have confessed their certainty. To this I respond: First, I have said that not all are certain. Secondly, perhaps it is better, according to the aforesaid, to say that they have not actually been certain, but that, because of their great desire for help, they are, so to speak, certain; and as though they were certain, they have asked to be helped quickly. So they rather imagine they are certain and timidly presume that they are certain as if they know for sure. It is as the gospel says, that the demons knew Jesus was the Christ, that is, they strongly imagined it, as the gloss²⁸ says. It is natural in every distress and anxiety to imagine very strongly that we may still be restored, although it may be more of a desire for restoration than the hope or knowledge of it, just as in the case of the demons there was more the desire to know than to have knowledge itself. For the actual knowledge of salvation does not make us anxious or cause us to tremble but makes us confident and enables us to bear all things with the greatest courage.

At this point one might ask: "Why is it, therefore, with regard to a particular judgment, and Innocent testified to this,²⁹ that at death the reputation of a man, no matter who he is, is tested, for it seems that by means of this a man is made certain concerning his condition?" I answer that it does not follow that he is made certain even if special judgment is passed. It can happen that a dead man is judged, indeed may be accused, nevertheless the opinion concerning him may be deferred and not revealed to him. In the meantime, however, while conscience accuses, devils wheedle, and the wrath of God threatens, the wretched soul does nothing but tremble with horror at the judgment which may come at any moment, just as it trembles at the prospect of physical death. Deuteronomy 28[:65-67] threatens, "The Lord will give you a trembling heart.. and your life shall hang in doubt before you...In the morning you shall say, 'Would that it were evening' and at evening you shall say, 'Would that it were morning.'" So there also, eternal death shall strike with a similar anxiety and torture the soul with a terrible horror. This interpretation is not far from the truth inasmuch as Christ also says in Matt. 5[:21-26] that the Lord distinguishes between those guilty of judgment, of council, and of hell, that is, between the accused, the convicted, and the condemned.

But certain authors, distinguished more by knowledge than reputation, dare to say that some souls, on account of the lukewarmness of their life [Rev. 3:16], will be snatched away by death and thus be cast out by God so that until the end of the world they will not know whether they are condemned or saved. If one accepts the story concerning the monk who was about to die and because of the sin of fornication was condemned, having already blasphemed against God, but was then restored to health, then it is evident enough that the judgment and accusation of hell can afflict the soul, even

though the final verdict has not been pronounced. This is borne out by a story in one of St. Gregory's [Gregory I, d. 604] sermons concerning a young man whom a dragon wanted to swallow up in death.

In positing this as most likely true concerning the whole matter of the punishments of purgatory, I am moved to do so, first of all, because of the nature of dread and anxiety, then because Scripture attributes this punishment to the damned, and, finally, because the whole church says that the punishments of hell and of purgatory are the same. Therefore I believe that this opinion of ours is sufficiently rooted in the Scriptures. Indeed, the trumpeters of indulgences seem to imagine that the punishments of souls are, as it were, inflicted externally and are entirely external, not born from within the conscience, as if God only removed the punishments from souls, and not souls from punishments. As it is written, "He relieved his shoulder of the burden" [Ps. 81:6]. It does not say, "He removed the burden from his shoulder:"

And again the Scripture says, "When you walk through fire, the flame shall not harm you" [Cf. Isa. 43:2]. In what manner shall it not do any harm except that God gives courage to the heart, so that the soul does not fear the fire. This does not mean, however, that there is no fire through which the soul must not pass. Therefore freeing the shoulder from burden does not take place except by healing the fear of the soul and by comforting the soul. No punishment is overcome by fear but by love and disdain. Indulgences do not remove fear but increase it as much as they can while giving the impression that they remove punishments like some despicable thing. However, God has purposed to have children who are fearless, untroubled, and generous forever and perfectly – children who shall fear absolutely nothing, but who through trust in his grace shall overcome and despise everything and make light of punishments and death. He hates the cowards who are confounded by a fear of all things, even by the sound of a fluttering leaf.

Another objection must be made at this point: "If souls bear punishments willingly, why do we pray for them?" I answer: Unless they bore them willingly, they would certainly be condemned. But why shouldn't they desire prayers said for them, since the Apostle also wanted prayers to be offered for him, that he might be freed from the unbelievers and that a door might be opened to him for the Word [Col. 4:3]. Yet Paul was one who with complete confidence gloried in the fact that he himself despised death. Even if souls would not desire prayers, nevertheless it is up to us to pity them in their fear and to help them with our prayer, just as we would for any others who are suffering. We should do this without making any distinctions, no matter how courageously they suffer. Finally, since souls do not grieve so much over present punishments as over their dread of impending and anticipated destruction, it is not strange if they should desire intercession in order that they might persevere and not falter in faith, since they are uncertain (as I have said) concerning their condition and do not fear so much the punishments of hell as the hatred of God, which is hell, just as Scripture says, "In death there is no remembrance of thee, in hell who can give thee praise" [Cf. Ps. 6:5]. It is evident, therefore, that they suffer, not because of the fear of punishment, but because of their love for righteousness, as I said above, for they are more afraid that they shall not praise and love God (which would actually happen in hell) than that they shall suffer. The whole church does right when it adds as much as it can this most holy and anxious desire of theirs, especially since God also wishes them to be helped through the church. We have finally come to the end of this vague and questionable disputation concerning the punishments of souls. If there are any who can produce better arguments concerning these matters, I shall not be jealous of them. I insist only that the one who does so should base his arguments on better examples of Scripture without veiling himself in the smoky opinions of men.

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.

I defend this thesis, but I do not yet assert it with finality. My reasons are these:

1. The first rests upon what was said in the fifth thesis, that only canonical punishment is remitted through the power of the keys. Therefore this thesis is a corollary of that one; to deny the one is to deny the other.

2. The second reason is drawn from that statement of the pope himself in which he says, "Concerning the imposed penances, we relax them with mercy." Therefore he does not relax those which are not imposed by himself or by canon law. I do not think that we must be concerned here about the arbitrary statement of certain scholars who say that when the pope does not add this clause concerning imposed penances, then one is to understand that he means simply the remission of all punishment. I might say that even if it is not added, it is understood that it should be added as a necessary clause and one that concerns the very essence of the statement. Otherwise my opponents should prove what they say by some text.

3. I come to the usual argument, which is the strongest of all, when I ask by what authorities they prove that punishments other than the canonical are waived through the power of the keys. In answer they point out to me Antoninus, Peter de Palude, Augustinus de Ancona, Capreolus. Finally, Angelus de Clavassio cites his predecessor, Francisco de Mayronis,³⁰ who carried the sale of indulgences so far that he dared to pronounce them meritorious, if it may please Christ. Indeed it is as if those men were of such importance and authority that whatever they think must be

immediately counted among the articles of faith. Rather they ought to be reproached for having brought forth these claims to our shame and harm, claims which they have invented in accordance with their pious desire, paying absolutely no attention to that faithful admonition of the Apostle, “Test everything; hold fast what is good” [I Thess. 5:21]. They are far more foolish than the Pythagoreans who assert only those things which Pythagoras has said. These, on the other hand, assert those things which the Pythagoreans doubted. But let us come to the source and fountains of these rivulets, that is SS. Thomas and Bonaventura.³¹ For my opponents have received some of their ideas from them and they have added some of their own. Therefore these men are holy and carry much weight.

However, since they state these things as their opinions rather than maintain them as certain – for even St. Bonaventura confesses that the matter is most doubtful and entirely uncertain – is it not also clear that nothing can be proved from them? See for yourself whether they cite any [canonical] text or Scripture! It is no wonder that they themselves assert nothing as certain. For since this matter would be an article of faith if it had been settled, therefore it is not up to the teachers to define it, for it must be supported also by the decision of a general council. Nor does the pope have the power heedlessly to decide on matters of faith; only indulgence preachers do. These are permitted to do whatever they wish. They all, however, have a single reason for their opinion, as Panormitanus also points out in book five of *Concerning Penance and Remission*, in the chapter entitled *Quod autem*, namely this: If indulgences are said to remit only canonical punishments, this makes indulgences of too little value.³² Therefore in order that indulgences might not be esteemed too lightly, they would rather invent something they know nothing about, since souls would not be endangered in any way if indulgences were worthless, to say nothing of the fact that they are. But it would be a most terrible thing to preach to souls about fictitious things and illusions, even if indulgences were found to be most useful. No consideration is given to the salvation of souls but only to ourselves, and in order that we may not appear as inadequate teachers, we work harder for the glorification of our own words, even though this is superfluous, than we do for the faith of the simple folk and those committed to our care, which is the only thing that is necessary. But before I answer SS. Thomas and Bonaventura, it seems worthwhile to enumerate opinions concerning indulgences lest I appear to be the first or only person to have expressed doubts about them.

The gloss to the chapter beginning with the words *Quod autem*, in book five of *Concerning Penance and Remission*, which deals with the declaration concerning the efficacy and power of indulgences, begins with these words: “The efficacy of such remissions is an old debatable question and one which is still rather doubtful.”

Some say indulgences are of use in the God-relationship but not in the church-relationship. For if anyone dies without mortal sin, and without having done penance, he feels the punishments of purgatory less in proportion to the measure of the remission granted him. Yet the church does not because of this relax the satisfaction for the living. This opinion is condemned by Panormitanus in the same place,³³ and I agree with him.

Others say indulgences are useful with regard to the penance which is imposed here over and beyond what is necessary for the sake of caution, that is, they are enjoined only with regard to those punishments which the pope has imposed, not according to the measure of the sin, but out of caution and to a greater extent than the sin deserves. This opinion is to be condemned more than the former.

Still others say indulgences are useful in relation to God and the church, but the one who grants the remission burdens himself with making satisfaction for the recipient. This also is absurd.

Others say indulgences are useful with regard to the remission of a penance which has been omitted through neglect. Panormitanus, in condemning this opinion, says that this rewards negligence. But in my judgment this is not altogether false, since actually all punishments are remitted, even those which have been omitted through neglect, provided one is displeased with one’s negligence. Even those punishments are remitted which have not been omitted through neglect and which must still be completed.

Others say that indulgences are valuable for relaxing imposed penances, provided the priest who has imposed the penance permits the one who confesses to exchange the penance for the remissions. This is the good and true meaning in the matter, except that it restricts the power of him who confers indulgences. It is true that indulgences relax imposed penances; but the consent of the one who has imposed them is not required.

The sixth interpretation of indulgences, which Panormitanus introduces beyond those five established in the aforesaid gloss, is to the effect that they are useful, as the words indicate, both with respect to God and with respect to the penance which is imposed here, and he says this interpretation is held by Gottfried, Hostiensis, and Johannes Andreae.³⁴ I myself also hold this as it stands and is conveyed by the words. But I do not follow them in their understanding of all words, especially that phrase “with respect to God.” If these words mean that even punishments imposed by God are remitted, either here or in purgatory, beyond the penances imposed by the church or canon law, I do not believe it is true, except in a qualified sense, since the punishments of purgatory are remitted through contrition alone, without the power of the keys. So if anyone shall have become perfectly contrite, I believe that, as far as God is concerned, he has been absolved from purgatory.

As far as punishments for deeds done in this life are concerned, however, I say that there is no authority for this, as I have pointed out sufficiently in Thesis 5. For that punishment cannot be identified which is believed to be remitted as far as God is concerned. So I might say that the phrase “with respect to God” should be understood to refer, not to the punishments imposed by God, but to those imposed by the church. The meaning should be that remission of penances imposed by the church pertains as much to God as to the church, because God approves this remission of his church according to that passage, “Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” [Matt. 16:19]. It does not say, “Whatever you shall loose on earth, something else shall be loosed in heaven,” but, “That very same thing which you loose I also shall consider as loosed.” For by this God wishes men to be subject to the priest, something which might not happen unless we knew that God approves the deeds of the priest. You see, therefore, that all these interpretations are based on mere opinions.

Again, that which Angelus³⁵ adduces from his Francisco de Mayronis, that indulgences are also valuable for the increase of grace and glory, does not take into account that indulgences are not good works but remissions of good works for the sake of another lesser work. For even if a good work, for which purpose indulgences are granted, may be meritorious, nevertheless indulgences are not therefore meritorious, since a work done by itself would be no less meritorious and perhaps more. Indeed indulgences taken by themselves are rather demeritorious because they are remissions of good works. Therefore since in every matter that is doubtful it is permissible for anyone to dispute and oppose it, I say that I differ from SS. Thomas and Bonaventura in this respect until they give better proof for their own claims and disprove mine. I see nothing but opinions adduced to prove their points, not even one canon, while I, on the other hand, have produced many passages of Scripture in Thesis 5 above to support my position. Now, in order that I too may not speak without proofs from canon law, consider what follows.

4. In the chapter beginning with the words, *Cum ex eo*, in book five of *Concerning Penance and Remission*, there is the statement, “Penitential satisfaction is weakened by indulgences.”³⁶ Though the pope may make this statement out of grief rather than out of grace, nevertheless the teachers of canon law interpret it as it stands. Therefore if penitential satisfaction is weakened, it is evident that only canonical punishment is remitted, since penitential satisfaction is nothing more than that third part of ecclesiastical and sacramental penance. For the church has nothing to do with evangelical satisfaction, as I have indicated previously.

But if anyone should disagree with me when I say that the pope does not deny that other punishments also are weakened, but merely affirms it and does not speak exclusively of that when he says, “Penitential satisfaction is weakened,” I answer: Prove then, that he also relaxes other punishments and that he does not speak exclusively of that. Since you do not do so, I prove that he does speak exclusively of that by referring to the chapter beginning *Cum ex eo*, cited above, where he says that hucksters of alms are permitted to place before the people nothing except that which is contained in their letters.³⁷ But nothing is contained in any apostolic document except remissions of sacramental satisfaction. As the pope himself says: “Penitential satisfaction is weakened by indiscreet and unnecessary indulgences.” Indeed by this word the pope places an even more severe restriction on indulgences, for if only unnecessary indulgences weaken sacramental satisfaction, then moderate and lawful indulgences do not weaken that penitential satisfaction. Much less do they weaken any other punishments. But these things are no affair of mine or of my doing; the teachers of canon law will see to this.

21

Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.

I assert this thesis absolutely and prove it.

At least the third punishment remains, that is, the evangelical punishment. The fifth also remains, namely death and sickness, and that which is considered by many to be the greatest of all punishments – the dread of death, trembling of conscience, weakness of faith, timidity of spirit. To compare these punishments with those remitted through indulgences would be the same as comparing an object with its shadow. But it is not the intention of the pope that they should chatter so lightly and smugly, as is evident from the chapter beginning *Cum ex eo*.³⁸

If, however, they should say, “We do not say that these punishments are removed by means of indulgences,” I answer, Why do you not explain to the people what you mean by the punishments which you remit? Instead, you shout that all punishments are remitted before God and the church, no matter what punishments a man should pay for his sins. How shall the people know thereby what you are talking about when you speak so vaguely and with such sweeping statements?

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.

I shall defend this thesis at no greater length than the eighth, from which it follows as a corollary, for the penitential canons do not apply to the other life. Every temporal punishment is changed into the punishment of death. Indeed, because of the punishment of death every punishment is removed and must be removed. For further proof of this, consider the Roman church as it was at the time of St. Gregory, when it had no jurisdiction over other churches, at least not over the Greek church. It is evident that canonical punishments were not binding upon the Greeks, just as they are not binding now for Christians who are not subject to the pope, as in the case of the Turks, Tartars, and Livonians. For these people, therefore, indulgences are not necessary, but only for those who come under the authority of the Roman church. If, therefore, they are not binding upon those who are living, much less are they binding upon the dead, who are not under the jurisdiction of any church.

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.

I interpret this to mean all kinds of punishment and declare the same. Undoubtedly enough has been said of the fact that remission of penitential satisfaction can be given to anyone. Indeed, I amend this thesis to read that the remission of all punishments can be granted absolutely to no one, whether he be perfect or imperfect. I prove this in the following way: Even though God should not impose scourges, or the fourth type of punishment, upon the most perfect, at least not for everybody and for all time, nevertheless there still remains the third type, the evangelical punishment, as well as the fourth, namely death and those punishments which are related to death and lead to death. Even if God could make all men perfect by grace, perhaps without punishments, nevertheless he has not decided to do it, but rather has decided that all men should conform to the image of his Son, that is to the cross [Cf. Rom. 8:29]. Why waste so many words? However highly one might extol the remission of punishments, what, I ask, is accomplished for that one who faces death and the fear of death and judgment? If every other remission is preached to a person and it is conceded that punishment is not remitted, I doubt whether this will be any consolation to him. Therefore keep in mind the dread of death and hell, and whether you want to or not, you will care nothing about remissions of other punishments: And so indulgences which do not take away the fear of death are not minimized through my effort but necessarily through what they are.

24

For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

I declare this also and know that it actually happens. For I myself have heard that many understand it in no other way than that they fly to heaven by means of indulgences without any punishment at all. It is no wonder, when preachers of indulgences write, teach, and shout so as to give the impression that if one has obtained indulgences and dies before he falls back into sin, he will straightaway fly to heaven. They say all these things as if there were no sins except actual sins, and as if the tinder [of original sin] which is left is not an impurity, not a hindrance, not a means which would delay entrance to the kingdom of heaven. Unless this [original sin] is healed, it is impossible to enter heaven, even if there is no actual sin present, "For nothing unclean shall enter it" [Rev. 21:27]. Wherefore the very dread of death, since it is an imperfection of the tinder and a sin, even by itself prevents one from entering the kingdom, for he who dies unwillingly obeys God's summons reluctantly. Insofar as he dies reluctantly he does not, in that case, do the will of God.

His sin is therefore as great as his disobedience to the will of God. So he is a very uncommon individual who, after he has obtained all indulgences, does not also sin in death. Those who desire to be released and beg for death are an exception. In order that I may not be entirely at variance with them, I say that if anyone is perfectly contrite, that is, if he hates himself and his life and loves death to the highest degree, he shall immediately go to heaven after his punishments have been remitted. See for yourself how many of these there are.

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 or parish.

This is that blasphemy which has made me worthy of a thousand deaths in the judgment of the indulgence hucksters, not to say “Shy locks.” But before I prove this thesis I shall say a little bit about my argument. First of all I repeat that I am disputing here not with regard to the meaning which I intend by these words (for I firmly assert this, since the whole church maintains it) but with regard to the words themselves.

So I ask my adversaries to bear the grief with which I am afflicted when I hear that these things, which have never been written or established, are preached in the church of Christ. For we read that at one time it seemed most dangerous to the holy fathers to teach anything beyond the heavenly rule, as Hilary says;³⁹ and the holy Spiridion,⁴⁰ bishop of Cyprus, observed this discipline so strictly that he interrupted a person who only used a Greek word ambiguously, saying “Take up your couch and walk” instead of “Take up your pallet or your bed and walk,” finding fault with the word he used even though it did not change the meaning at all.⁴¹ I think that in the interest of pure justice they owe me forbearance for my grief since, without any question or warning, we are compelled to bear their presumptions which they take a great delight in preaching, and which we suffer by listening to them.

I do not say these things or act in this way because I am so impudent and arrogant as to think that I must be numbered among the learned ones of the holy church, much less among those whose province it is to decide upon these things or to condemn them. Would that I might once deserve to be accounted the most insignificant member of the church. I do this rather for the following reasons: Although there are in the church men who are most learned as well as most holy, nevertheless it is the tragedy of our age that even such great men are not able to help the church.

An example of what learning and godly zeal could do today has been adequately proved by the unfortunate fate of those most learned and holy men who, under Julius II, desired to reform the church by calling a general council for that purpose.⁴² There have been, to my knowledge, a few good and learned pontiffs but the example of these is overshadowed by that of the many. “For it is a most evil time,” as the prophet Amos says, “therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time” [Amos 5:13].

Finally, we now have a very good pope, Leo X, whose integrity and learning are a delight to all upright persons. But what can this man who is so worthy of our respect do amidst such confusing circumstances? He is worthy of having become pope in better times, or of having better times during his pontificate. In our day we are only worthy of popes like Julius II, Alexander VI, or some other tyrannous Mezentians⁴³ as described by the poets. For today even Rome itself laughs at the good popes, indeed Rome most of all. In what part of the Christian world do they ridicule the popes more freely than in that veritable Babylon, Rome? But enough of that. Since the church has the most learned people in positions of authority, except for countless private persons, I should keep quiet if, according to their standard, I should like to be considered wise. But it is better for the truth to be spoken by fools, children, and drunkards than to be silenced completely, so that the faith of the learned and wise might become more lively when they hear that we, the ignorant mob, finally cry out against the overwhelming indignity of the matter, just as Christ says, “If these were silent, the very stones would cry out” [Luke 19:40].

With this preface I come to the thesis and will consider it, first, according to the meaning and, secondly, according to the words or the opinion of others. Therefore in this thesis I say nothing concerning the power of jurisdiction which I shall deny in the thesis immediately following and which I have denied in the same manner in Theses 22 and 8 above. For they have taken this authority from the words previously mentioned, about which authority I say, as I have said before, that the church may decide upon the other part of that question and I will gladly acquiesce. In the meantime, may the insolent exponents of their dreams desist.

I doubt and dispute whether the popes have the power of jurisdiction over purgatory. As much as I have read and perceive up to this moment, I hold fast to the negative position. I am prepared, however, to maintain the affirmative after the church has decided upon it. Meanwhile I speak here concerning the power of energies, not of laws – the power of working, not of commanding – so that the meaning is this: The pope has absolutely no authority over purgatory, nor does any other bishop. If, however, he does have some authority, he certainly has only the same kind in which his subordinates also share.

Moreover, this is an authority by which the pope and any Christian who so wishes can intercede, pray for, fast, etc. on behalf of departed souls – the pope in a general way, the bishops in a particular way, and the Christian in an individual way. Therefore it is evident that the thesis is absolutely true. For just as the pope, at one time and with the whole church, may intercede for souls (as is done on All Souls’ Day), so every bishop who wishes may do it with his own diocese (as is done on “Common Days”),⁴⁴ also the curate in his own parish (as is done at funerals and anniversaries), and any Christian who wishes in his own private devotion. Either one denies that such aid is an intercession or else concedes that each and every prelate, along with his subordinates, can intercede for souls. I think that these things are not nearly as doubtful as those bold statements of my opponents concerning the jurisdiction of the church over purgatory.

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.

I do not believe it is necessary again to declare publicly that which I here debate or maintain. However, since in our time the inquisitors of heretical depravity are so zealous that they attempt by force to drive the most orthodox Christians to heresy, it would be best to give an explanation for every single syllable. It is not very clear to me what else Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Lorenzo Valla, Peter of Ravenna, John of Wesel, and very recently Johann Reuchlin and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples⁴⁵ did to be considered evil despite their good reputation, unless it is that they failed to explain every single syllable (as I have said). So great is the tyranny of young zealots and effeminate healers in the church today! Therefore I declare once again that I am about to do two things in this thesis, first, to discuss the power of the keys over purgatory and prove that it has no such power, until someone who affirms it shall prove that it does, and second, to inquire into that method and manner of intercession. for the souls of the dead.

The first I prove in this manner:

1. According to that generally accepted reasoning of Henry of Segusio, namely, if the keys themselves should extend to purgatory, they could empty purgatory. Therefore the pope would be cruel if he did not empty purgatory.

They resolve this argument thus: The pope can, but he must not, empty it unless there is a justifiable and reasonable cause for doing so, lest he act rashly against divine justice. I hardly think that they would advance this cold and careless solution unless they do not care what they say, or unless they think that they are talking to sea calves who are in deepest sleep. So it happens that from one given absurdity many others follow. As the saying goes, "One lie requires seven lies to make it appear true."⁴⁶

Therefore this argument could hardly be supported more strongly than by such refutation. We now ask, what will be the name of this reasonable cause? It is well known that indulgences are granted either for participating in the war against the infidels or for building churches or for some other common need of this life. But none of these reasons is so great that love is not incomparably greater, more righteous, and more reasonable. Therefore, if divine justice is not offended when, for the sake of the bodies of the faithful and the protection of their goods, or for the benefit of inanimate buildings, or the briefest need of this corruptible life, as many sins are remitted as one should desire (even if one includes all people in that number so that purgatory would be evacuated), how much less is divine justice offended if, for the sake of holy love, all men are redeemed. Probably, however, divine justice is so unfair or gloomy that it is more favorably inclined to a love for the property and purse of the living than it is to souls that give evidence of such needs.

Especially is this so since it is of such great importance to give aid to souls, so that the faithful should prefer to serve the Turks and be killed in body than to lose their souls. Therefore if the pope for a lesser purpose would redeem an infinite number of souls, even for the same reason all souls, why would he not also redeem men for the sake of that which is greatest, that is, for the sake of love? Nevertheless, at this point I might advise those who have their backs to the wall to say that there can be no reasonable cause so that they may safely slip out from under this objection. Even if the pope had the power of jurisdiction over purgatory as far as he himself is concerned, he does not have it as far as the reason for such action is concerned, for such a reason does not exist.

2. The very manner in which the pope speaks about imposed penances proves the same thing. Moreover it is evident that he gives only as much as he declares, and that he gives in the manner in which he declares, therefore just as a bishop remits forty days, a cardinal one hundred days of the imposed penances, so the pope remits completely all the days of the penances which have been imposed. Yet no power of the keys has imposed the punishments of purgatory.

In this matter a pretty dreamer has conjured up the following: When the pope says, "We grant indulgences for all sins with respect to imposed penance," it is understood to refer to a punishment imposed by the priest. However, when he says, "We grant indulgences for all sins for which they have been truly sorry and which they have confessed," then those which have been forgotten or which they do not know about are not remitted. But when he says, "We grant remission of all sins," then the soul flies to heaven at death. Thus the pope has the power to save whomever he wishes. What madness! Behold how confidently this boaster makes this claim, as if he were proclaiming an oracle! If I should say to him, I beseech you, how shall I prove this, if I must give a reason for this belief [Cf. I Pet. 3:15], perhaps he would invent other new lies, by means of which he would resolve these first big lies with even greater ones. Oh unhappy Christians who are compelled to listen to all these things that these weak-minded men are permitted to babble at length, as if we did not have the Scripture itself which Christ has commanded us to teach the people, and whom we should give the measure of wheat instead of jars of burrs and thistles!

Among other strange tales, which this most persuasive writer invents here, is the fact that he dares to try to persuade us that the pope has the power of remitting or not remitting sins which we do not know about or which have been forgotten, as if the whole church did not know that after the pope has done all his pardoning it still remains for all the faithful to say: "Who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults, O Lord" [Ps. 19:12]. The whole church

knows that along with Job we must be afraid of our good works, lest they be considered by God as terrible sins [Cf. Job 9:28]. But the holder of the keys of the church does not know or determine whether good works are evil or not before God; much less does he remit them. Secondly, this dream of his elaborates on that most tedious and useless art of confessing, rather of leading souls to despair and destruction, in which we are taught even to count the sand, that is, to examine, gather together, and weigh every single sin in order to make us truly repentant. But if we do this we shall revive the lusts or hateful memories of the past, and while we confess past sins, we sin anew. Even if the best kind of repentance results, it would surely be only forced, wretched, and insincere, brought forth artificially out of fear of punishment. Out of such fear we are taught to feel sorrow for sins, that is, we are taught to attempt the impossible or make matters worse.

True sorrow must spring from the goodness and mercies of God, especially from the wounds of Christ, so that man comes first of all to a sense of his own ingratitude in view of divine goodness and thereupon to hatred of himself and love of the kindness of God. Then tears will flow and he will hate himself from the very depth of his heart, yet without despair. Then he will hate sin, not because of the punishment but because of his regard for the goodness of God; and when he has perceived this he will be preserved from despair and will despise himself most ardently, yet joyfully. Then, when he has true sorrow for one single sin, he will at the same time have true sorrow for all sins. Thus the Apostle says in Rom. 2[:4], "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" Oh St. Paul, how many there are who do not know that, even those who teach others! So we read in the book of Numbers [21:9], that the children of Israel were not freed from their fiery serpents through the sight and the dread of them, but rather by turning their eyes from them to the bronze serpent, that is to Christ. Likewise also they were terrified when they saw the Egyptians; but after they had turned their backs to them and crossed the sea they were saved [Exod. 14:10,22]. So our sins must be borne by the wounded Christ rather than in our own conscience. For in Christ our sins are dead, but in us they live. Otherwise, if the torture chamber of those sins were to be preserved, it might happen that a person suddenly snatched away by death could not be saved because he has no time to recollect his sins. But my opponents have an answer for this!

Therefore it can be said in answer to that contriver of falsehood: In every remission of the pope, especially in that one which is made in public and before the entire church (as is the case in indulgences), that phrase, "regarding imposed penances," should be understood to include sins that are either forgotten or not known, for these do not belong to the jurisdiction of the church.

Moreover, that sea of words (it seems to me) of the indulgence preachers has stemmed from a certain neglect to examine the origin of indulgences. For at that time when canonical penances were considered very important, four days was considered a remission of great length. Later they began to grant a hundred days, then a thousand days, finally many thousands of days, then years, then hundreds and thousands of years. So little by little a greater and greater generosity developed with respect to indulgences. After this one-seventh of all sins began to be remitted, then one-third, lately one-half, and thus it has come to plenary remission of all sins, as one can well see even yet in the main churches⁴⁷ of the city of Rome. But if the imposed penance is understood with reference to the first stages, it must certainly also be understood with reference to plenary remission.

3. Once again the manner in which the pope speaks supports this thesis when he says he grants remission "by means of intercession," for the means of intercession must be separated from the means of authority of jurisdiction. If we shall believe the pope himself (as we should) more than any of those preachers or ourselves, it is clear that no authority, but only intercession is of any avail for those in purgatory. At any rate it is safer for me to agree with the pope than with them. The pope does not arrogate to himself authority but claims for himself the right of intercession. I am surprised by the confidence with which the indulgence preachers, contrary to the expressed prohibition of the chapter beginning *Cum ex eo*,⁴⁸ dare to proclaim more than is contained in the papal documents, since only the means of intercession is contained there. If it is their understanding that the pope does not have any power of jurisdiction over purgatory, although he does have the power of the keys for applying intercessory prayers for those in purgatory, I say here and now that no one denies this. The power of applying either intercession, satisfaction, or the praises of God is absolutely in the jurisdiction of the supreme pontiff. Whether or not that power thus belongs to the pope alone, so that not even other bishops possess it, as I have said in the preceding thesis, or what is involved in that method of application which I do not yet understand, I shall discuss in the second part of this thesis. Meanwhile we shall pursue the discussion of this first part further.

4. By far the strongest reason is that Christ states, not in ambiguous, but in clear, open, and concise words: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" [Matt. 16:19]. He has not added the words "on earth" in vain. Otherwise, if he had not wished to restrict the power of the keys, it would have been sufficient to say, "Whatever you loose shall be loosed." Therefore either Christ was a babler who used too many words, or else the power of the keys applies only upon earth. But here, oh gracious God, how manifest is the superstition of certain people, who without the knowledge and will of the pope wish by means of these words to give him authority, where he appropriates for himself only intercession. And when they realized that these words of Christ strongly opposed them and exposed their error, they did not thereby cease to defend their error and make their opinion conform to

the clear words of Christ. On the contrary they make his words conform to their perverted meaning and twist them, saying, ‘That term ‘upon earth’ can be construed in two different ways, in one way as pertaining to the one who looses, in another way as pertaining to that which must be loosed.’ According to the first way, Christ must be understood as having said, ‘Whatever Peter shall have loosed while he was on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.’ Perhaps they also wish that if he should loose the devil (provided he were loosed on earth) the latter would be loosed in heaven. For he who says ‘whatever’ and adds nothing to limit it certainly shows that everything may be loosed.

I do not know with what words I should label this rude and insolent superstition – this brazenness. The author here is worthy of the displeasure and eloquence of a Jerome, so that such a presumptuous violence and corruption of the sacred words of Christ would be avenged. Grammar itself could have taught them that this meaning of theirs could not be maintained according to these words (but they follow a new dialectic rather than correct grammar). It seems as though they knew all along that Christ was afraid that some day some such Peter or pope would arise who even though dead would desire to bind and loose. Thus it would become necessary for him to anticipate such an extraordinary ambition and tyranny of dead popes and to prevent them from binding and loosing except while they were alive and upon earth. (To ridicule in a fitting manner such worthy interpreters of Scripture), perhaps Christ had reason to fear – and not without reason – that some day a dead pope might bind something which his living successor might loose. Then great confusion would arise in heaven and the troubled Christ would not know which of these two works he should approve, since he had rashly permitted the same work to both of them and did not add the words ‘on earth’ in order to restrain the dead pope.

If they do not understand this in such a manner, why do they get so excited? Why do they try so hard to show that the phrase ‘on earth’ pertains to the one who does the loosing? Behold, indeed, this little golden work of a golden teacher!⁴⁹ It is a work most worthy of golden letters, and lest there be something about it which is not golden, it must be handed down by golden disciples, namely, by those about whom it is said, ‘The idols of the nations are silver and gold. . . They have eyes, but they see not, etc.’ [Ps. 135:15 -16]. These people proceed in a straight path against Christ. Christ has added the phrase ‘on earth’ in order that the pope, who cannot be anywhere except on earth, might not presume to bind and loose that which is not on earth. It is as though Christ purposely wanted to anticipate the detestable flatterers of our day and to restrain them when they proceed to hand over to the pope the kingdom of the dead against his will and despite his objection. St. Jerome, because of his zeal, would have called these individuals ‘theologians,’ that is, people through whom God speaks but actually that god who, according to Virgil, inspires his soothsayers to great frenzy.⁵⁰ Nevertheless we shall discuss this matter in opposition to them.

First, if, according to this understanding the keys loose the dead, they also bind them, since the phrase ‘on earth’ is added in both cases when it reads, ‘Whatever you bind on earth.’ There fore we must discriminate here also with the same diligence and discernment and interpret the phrase ‘on earth’ with a two -fold meaning, in one sense as pertaining to the one who does the binding, in the second sense as pertaining to that which must be bound. Thus they should conclude that the pope can bind beneath the earth, in purgatory. But we should take care (in the manner of good physicians, of course) that he does this while he is alive and on earth, for if he is dead he cannot bind. But if the first part of the words of Christ does not suffer such an unbearable and violent mockery as this, as they themselves maintain, although they are badly lacking in judgment, with what impudence will they dare to attribute that force to the second part, since this has been composed in a similar vein throughout? Or, perhaps, they should be permitted, according to their custom, to call everything one and the same and to speak ambiguously and deceitfully however and wherever they please. They may say that the term ‘on earth’ pertains in the first part of Christ’s words to that which must be bound, but in the second part to the one who does the loosing, for they have dragged even more monstrous things into the Holy Scripture, according to their praiseworthy custom.

Therefore, since everyone denies that the keys have power to bind in purgatory, it must also be denied that they have power to loose, for both of these are equal powers and have been given equally by Christ to his church. This is the opinion of certain ones who are not the worst jurists. My opponents may judge whether they are saner than the others.

Second, this opinion is also refuted by their own antithesis, ‘in heaven’ – ‘on earth.’ For just as the term ‘in heaven’ refers undoubtedly to what must be loosed in heaven, so the term ‘on earth’ must refer to what must be loosed on earth. And again, just as the term ‘in heaven’ refers to what is bound, so the term ‘on earth’ must refer to what is bound. Hence Christ purposely has not said, ‘I shall loose in heaven,’ but rather, ‘it shall be loosed in heaven,’ so that, if anyone by the first word, ‘Whatever you shall loose upon earth,’ should try to deduce from it a false interpretation, he would be prevented from doing so by the conclusion. And one would not be permitted to apply this word to him who does the loosing, for the premise ‘what is loosed in heaven’ must certainly be understood to refer to the conclusion ‘what is loosed upon earth,’ and not to the one who does the loosing. Likewise what is bound in heaven must be understood to refer not to the one who does the binding, but to what is bound on earth, or at least to both.

Third, if the power of the keys extends to purgatory, why do they go to all this futile trouble? Why do they not omit the word ‘intercession’? Why do they not persuade the pope to say that he looses and binds by means of his power

and authority rather than by mediation of intercession? Surely whatever he shall loose (only let him be careful that he is not dead!) shall be loosed. Why does he annoy us with the word ‘intercession,’ which no one understands as ‘power,’ but everyone as ‘mediation’?

Rather we should do even more and ask the pope to do away with purgatory and remove it from the realm of nature. For if the keys of the church extend so far, even with regard to that which must be loosed, then the whole of purgatory is under the pope’s authority. I prove this in the following manner: The pope should give plenary remission to all those who are in purgatory; secondly, in a similar manner he should give that same remission to all those Christians who are about to die. Then it would be certain that no one shall remain in purgatory, no one shall enter it, but everybody shall fly to heaven and purgatory shall end. Moreover he is in duty bound to grant plenary remission; and there is a most just reason why he should, namely, love, which must be sought through all things, above all things, and in all things. Nor do we need to fear that divine justice will be offended by love, for it is toward that end that righteousness actually impels us. But if this is done, we shall lay aside the whole ‘Office of the Dead,’ which today is burdensome and neglected enough, and change it into a festival service.

Fourth and last, if the punishment of purgatory is a corrective and punitive one, as I mentioned in Thesis 5, then it is certain that it cannot be loosed by the power of the keys. The exhaustive classification of punishments makes it sufficiently clear in my opinion that no other punishment exists.

Therefore the first part of this thesis is clear, and thereby the whole thesis has, in all probability, confirmed the fact that the pope’s intercession and not his power of jurisdiction affects purgatory.

It was not my intention that the second part of my thesis, namely, that which deals with the method of intercession, should be investigated. And it is not necessary for the sake of my arguments to know what that method is or what its nature is. Nevertheless I shall express myself in that matter, which I could justifiably overlook, in order that I may not appear to dodge the issue. Without prejudice to my position in any way, I declare that it is not for me to decide what that method of intercession should be; it is a matter for the pope or even perhaps for a church council to decide. It is my intention only to inquire, discuss, and, by citing reasons, to indicate what I understand that method to be or what I do not yet understand it to be.

Intercession is applied to souls in a two-fold manner: first, by the act of intercession itself and by means of the current burial service which takes place when the priest prays with the people, fasts, sacrifices, and does other designated works for designated souls. Undoubtedly this kind of intercession has much in its favor and, as St. Augustine points out, it redeems souls according to their desert and God’s good pleasure.⁵¹ As I said in the preceding thesis in regard to this matter, a bishop has as much power in a particular way as the pope has in a general way, namely, not that of jurisdiction, but of making intercession in regard to purgatory. The method is not considered here, as is evident.

In the second place, intercession is made without a public service, but purely by official announcement, either in writing or orally. And this is done from two treasuries.

The first treasury is that of the church triumphant, which is the merit of Christ and his saints, who have achieved more merit than is necessary for salvation. This treasury has been left to the church to reward and balance out merits here, as my opponents maintain.

The other is the treasury of the church militant. Such merits are the good works of living Christians which the pope has authority to apply either for the satisfaction of those who do penances, or for intercession on behalf of the dead, or for the praise and glory of God. On a former occasion I have both taught and written that the pope in three different ways has authority over the merits of the church militant: first, to offer these merits to God for the satisfaction of others; second, to use them for intercession of souls; third, for the praise of God. If this is true, I firmly believe that the bishops have this same spiritual power in their dioceses. If I am wrong, let him who can correct me. Otherwise how could those brotherhoods exist without erring in which higher and lower prelates impart to each other their endeavors and good works? The same question applies to monasteries, orders, hospitals, and parishes. All of this only makes sense if in this way the work of one makes satisfaction for the sins of another, intercedes for him before God, and glorifies God.

Therefore I say the following:

Even though I do not understand at all how those merits of the church militant may come under the authority of the pope, I shall meanwhile believe it out of respect until someone cuts the Gordian knot. However, I do not understand it for the following reasons.

First, if the pope presents the works of the living as sacrifices for the living, I do not see how that can be remission out of grace and not true and just satisfaction and payment up to the very last penny. Although he for whom remission is made does nothing, others work and make satisfaction for him. Then that will happen which all constantly deny, namely, that he who grants remission burdens himself to make satisfaction for another. Actually, then, the pope does not remit sins but makes satisfaction through the good works of his subordinates.

The second reason is that the power of the keys of the church would do absolutely nothing more than what has already actually been done in the church, even without the power of the keys. According to the law of love each one is constrained to pray for the other. The Apostle says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" [Gal. 6:2].

The third reason is that the term "indulgence" contradicts the meaning of the term itself, for the term should mean "to grant," that is, "to remit," so that a person does not need to do what he should do. This does not mean to impose something upon another, however, or to declare that it has been so imposed. The indulgence certainly wipes out the debt, but it does not pay the debt through someone else. Therefore it seems to me that the power of the keys alone, without the treasury of the church militant, suffices for indulgences, especially since only the canonical, not the evangelical, satisfaction is remitted. Otherwise one must say again what I have said previously concerning the remission of guilt, that is, that the pope also remits punishments by means of this treasury, that is, he declares that something happens which takes place without the treasury, namely that the church makes satisfaction for the one to whom the punishment is remitted. As St. Augustine says, no one will be raised up except the one whom the unity of the church raises up, which he says is symbolized in the case of the widow.⁵² But it still holds true, as indicated in the first and second reason, that it is a satisfaction rather than a remission, whether it is declared or granted.

Fourth, this treasury of the church militant produces the grace of the Spirit rather than the remission of punishment. It appears to be treated in a very cheap manner when it is applied to the remission of punishments. For remission of punishments is the cheapest gift the church grants, which, it seems, is given even to the wicked and, it seems, already by the power of the keys.

In the second place I say the following:

I do not know how it happens or what takes place when the pope applies the treasury of the church to the intercession for the dead. My reasons are these:

First, because the pope does not seem to do anything more than what has already actually been done. For the church as a whole actually prays and intercedes for the dead; unless the thought here is that he does it by way of explanation. I do not see how this is any different from what is said concerning the mass, that is, that the mass is more profitable if it is applied by the priest for the benefit of one person than if it is celebrated for all without application to any one particular member. I confess that I believe this is true. But the pope as the highest and general priest of all priests certainly can do nothing more than apply it generally; indeed he is under obligation to do this, even without letters of indulgences.

Second, since only canonical punishments are remitted through indulgences, I certainly cannot understand what it is that is remitted for souls in purgatory since the canon laws do not bind them. Finally, at death they are freed from canonical punishments, for every priest is a pope in the hour of death. By the same token no soul suffers in purgatory because of crimes and mortal sins, but only because of venial sins, as is stated in chapter 25, in the section beginning with the word *Qualis*.⁵³ The canons, moreover, are imposed for venial sins; not for secret mortal sins, but only for acknowledged crimes, as I have indicated previously. Therefore, let him who can say how indulgences, that is, remissions of the canons, help people, when the pope only bestows indulgences, indeed, when indulgences are granted out of superfluous caution (as also the dead are usually absolved in the year of the church), and how the pope includes the application of the merits of the church with indulgences. Then certainly indulgences do not become an intercession, but are granted to souls along with intercession, as it were as a second gift, that is, they are declared as given, or are applied.

I say in the third place: Concerning the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints as applied to the remission of punishments I shall speak later in Thesis 58. You see how obscure and doubtful all these matters are, and therefore how extremely dangerous to teach. I see and say this one thing, that the pope according to the work of Clement, *Concerning Penance and Remission*, the section beginning with the word *Abusionibus*,⁵⁴ seems to condemn the opinion that souls can be redeemed by indulgences. According to Clement, the pope says, "In asserting that they release souls from purgatory, they lie." Clement's explanation of the word "lie" says, "Because they are reserved for the judgment of God." And chapter 25, the section beginning with the word *Qualis*,⁵⁵ attests to this, and it seems absolutely right to me. For if souls are redeemed through intercession it does not thereby follow that they immediately fly to heaven. The words "intercede," "redeem," and "free" do not have the same meaning. I am discerning enough to see that indulgences and the intercession of the merits of the church are two entirely different things. One can be given without the other and with the other. The power of the keys alone suffices for indulgences without adding the treasury of merits. This treasury can either be added to the power of the keys or applied by itself. The treasury taken by itself can effect participation in good works of the church, as I have said before. If these things are certain and true, it follows that indulgences, insofar as there are such things, are of absolutely no value to people, unless individuals are absolved in the presence of the church, that is, are declared absolved. If they should have any value it would not be because they possess it in their own right but because another gift has been added to them, namely the merits of the church. These merits of the church must, on the other hand,

be distinguished from the general application, by which the church through the merits of the saints actually helps people without the application of the pope. One must determine what value these merits of the church have. But the work of inquiring must be left to others who have not yet lost their desire for doing so because of the many doubts that have been raised.

The objections to my arguments are these:

First, it is frequently claimed that a certain professor in Paris⁵⁶ maintained in a disputation that the pope has power over purgatory. When the pope learned of this he granted remission to the professor after his death, thereby supporting or, as it were, commending the truth of the man's assertion.

My answer to this is: It makes no difference to me what pleases or displeases the pope. He is a human being just like the rest of us. There have been many popes who have been pleased not only with errors and vices but even with horrible things. I listen to the pope as pope, that is, when he speaks in and according to the canons, or when he makes a decision in accordance with a general council. I do not listen to him, however, when he speaks his own mind. In this way I am not compelled to say with certain people who hardly know the teaching of Christ that the horrible murders committed by Julius II⁵⁷ among Christians might have been blessings by which he demonstrated to the flock of Christ that he was a true shepherd.

The second objection to my argument is this: St. Bonaventura in Book 4, chapter 20, says that one must not resist strenuously if anyone should maintain that the pope has power over purgatory.

I answer, first, that the authority of St. Bonaventura is not sufficient in this matter. Second, if the pope has maintained this, one must not oppose it. Third, Bonaventura speaks rightly, because he expresses his opinion by adding the words, "only if that claim is supported by the clear authority of the Scriptures or reasonable proof." So far no clear authority for that claim exists.

At this point the following objection is raised:

First, Sixtus IV is said to have decided that the method of intercession in no way lessens the over-all value of indulgences.⁵⁸

My answer is this: First, if anyone wishes to be obstinate about this, he should say, "Prove what you say, Holy Father, especially since it is not for the pope alone to decide upon new articles of faith, but, according to the laws, to make judgments and decisions about questions of faith. This, however, would be a new article of faith. Therefore that decision would be a matter for a general council much more than the doctrine of the conception of the Holy Virgin would be, especially since the latter constitutes no danger, while determining new articles of faith on the part of the pope could be a grave and great danger for people. Otherwise, since the pope is only human and can err in matters of faith and morals, the faith of the whole church would be constantly in danger if it were necessary to believe as true whatever might occur to the pope to be true.

Second, even if the pope along with a large part of the church should feel thus and so, and even if it were true that he does not err, it is still not a sin, nor is it heresy, to take the opposite position, especially in something which is not necessary for salvation, until the one position has been rejected by a general council and the other approved. But, lest I become too involved, let me state that my position is proved in this one instance, namely, that the Roman church along with the general council at Basel and almost with the whole church feels that the Holy Virgin was conceived without sin. Yet those who hold the opposite opinion should not be considered heretics, since their opinion has not been disproved.

Third, I have not read the decision of Sixtus IV, but I have read another to the effect that indulgences are bestowed for the dead, by means of intercession. It does not follow from this, however, that therefore souls for whom the intercession is made fly to heaven.

Fourth, I cannot be the interpreter of a word that is unfamiliar to me, and even less can I be the pope's interpreter. Therefore, until he interprets it himself, I shall continue to have my opinions and defend them out of self-respect in discussing this poorly understood matter. The statement of Sixtus can be understood in a twofold manner. First: "The method of intercession does not lessen the over-all value of indulgences." That means that even if an indulgence should be given, not as an indulgence, but as an intercession, nevertheless, by such approval and intercession of the pope, those for whose benefit the intercession has been made certainly fly to heaven. They go to heaven, not because they have been loosed, but because intercession has been made for them. I myself do not believe this, but my opponents think it is true. Second: "The method of intercession does not lessen the over-all value of indulgences." This means that, when indulgences are applied for the souls of the dead by the method of intercession, they retain their basic nature, that is, they are plenary indulgences and do not lose that essential nature, though they operate not as indulgences but as intercession. I accept this meaning and add to it the thought: If it is true that intercession does not lessen indulgences in any way, it is also true that the application of intercession does not increase the value of indulgences in any way. It follows from this that souls do not go to heaven by indulgences. And even the words themselves confirm this fact, for the statement does not say, "The method of intercession fully redeems souls," but rather, "It does not lessen the over-all value of

indulgences.” Therefore indulgences, of whatever nature they may be, do only as much as intercession can do and no more.

Another objection to my argument is this:

The form of apostolic absolution reads: “I remit for you the punishments of purgatory, as far as the keys of the holy mother church extend.” And the pope’s father confessors observe this form, even in Rome.

My first answer to this objection is that these words are irrelevant, for the form mentioned is that for absolving the living and the dying. It is not a form for applying indulgences to those already dead.

Yet in the interests of searching for the truth, I say, second, that since these words are doubtful and posited in an unintelligible manner one cannot err in faith if one holds to an opinion contrary to that which the fathers think should be accepted. Why does the form worry them? Why does the author say, as though he were in doubt, “As far as the keys extend”? That dangling tail makes me suspicious. I am not duty bound to believe firmly that which the pope himself does not dare to pronounce with certainty. Why does he add the words “as far as the keys extend” only here and not elsewhere? Do you not see how vigilant Christ is in his church, that he does not even permit those to err who want to err? If only we would not rush headlong into error by neglecting his warning!

I say in the third place, as I have said previously, that even if the pope, along with his father confessors, should not err here, those who deny the pope’s meaning or do not believe it are not thereby heretics, until one or other of these opinions will have been accepted or rejected by the judgment of the general council. Even though they adorn the festival of the Conception of the Virgin Mary with indulgences as a settled matter of faith, they still do not condemn or bind those who do not seek the release which such indulgences bring. No matter how many indulgences may be granted, it is not necessary to accept that form of apostolic absolution as true until the church decides upon it. You see again how necessary it is to have an official and general council. But I am afraid our generation is not worthy enough to be granted such a boon, but only to be mocked by the works of error [II Thess. 2:11] which we have deserved.

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They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.

They preach a man-made doctrine, that is, vanity and lies, according to that word of Scripture, “Every man is a liar” [Cf. Ps. 116:11], and that statement, “Every man living is superficial” [Cf. Ps. 39:6]. This thesis needs no proof, in my opinion. Nevertheless it is proven by the following conclusion: “Because the intercession of the church for souls in purgatory is efficacious by virtue of the will of God and dependent on the merit of the soul.” But even if their opinion were true, that souls are benefited by means of intercession, it does not follow that souls immediately fly from purgatory to heaven.

1. It does not follow, first, because it is not the intercession but the favorable hearing of the intercession and the acceptance of it that frees, since souls are set free not by the prayers of the church but by the work of God.

2. As is evident from the prayers and teachings of all saints, God acts in such a way that he is quick to hear and slow to give in order to test our perseverance. Therefore long lapses of time occur between intercession and the favorable hearing and fulfilment of it.

3. It does not follow that, because the same thing has been taught recently without authority and contrary to the prohibition of church law, nothing is to be taught by indulgence preachers which goes beyond their letters of authorization. Therefore they do not speak the words of God and the church, which are true, but they speak their own thoughts, which are lies.

5.⁵⁹ There is no difference between one who knows he speaks falsehood and one who maintains something as certain which he does not know to be certain. For the one who speaks the truth also lies at times. These men know that those things just stated are uncertain and yet they affirm them with as much certainty as they do the gospel. They cannot prove these words to be certain by any authority of Scripture or by reason.

6. Intercession, then, would be better as a service to another, and then only by chance, than for a man’s own benefit, for it is not as profitable for the one who makes intercession as for another on whose behalf it is made. This is a specious claim. For that reason I pass over this, especially since they dare to admit that intercession is not profitable to the one who makes it, but to the soul for whom it is made. I could make a laughing-stock out of these inventions of theirs and ridicule them just as they ridicule the truth by means of them, but I refrain from doing this in order that I may not appear to consider these matters as dogma rather than as a problem for debate.

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.

It is strange that my opponents do not preach the most precious gospel of Christ with as great a desire and loud wailing as they do other things. The fact that they seem to think more of profit than of piety makes me suspicious of this business. Perhaps, however, they may be justifiably excused by the fact that they do not know the gospel of Christ. Therefore, since indulgences possess no piety, no merit, and are not a command of Christ, but only something that is permitted, even though it may be a pious work which redeems people, it certainly appears that profit rather than piety is increased by indulgences. For these indulgences are promoted so extensively and exclusively that the gospel is treated as an inferior thing and is hardly mentioned.

1. My first proof of this thesis is that the intercession of the church does not come under the jurisdiction of the pope. And the pope does not have the power to say that the intercession is accepted by God, but only that it can be offered. This is so even if their opinion were correct which is to the effect that souls are redeemed through this intercession.

2. According to their interpretation the commonly accepted opinion of St. Augustine⁶⁰ would be false, to the effect that intercessions are profitable only to those who deserve to profit from them, for they would be profitable for whomever they should profit only by authority of the pope, not through the merits of people themselves.

3. It is contrary to the nature and meaning of the word ‘intercession’ to say that the pope has power to redeem through intercession. For however excellent a work may be, if it is turned into intercession, it operates not as a work but as intercession. It is much rather the favorable hearing of intercession which redeems. Therefore, either they are talking about intercession by the use of other terminology and thereby are deceiving people even more wickedly, or else they are talking about their own opinion of intercession by the use of accepted terminology. In the latter case their opinion does not prevail, since the meaning and concept of ‘power’ cannot be reconciled with the word ‘intercession.’

4. If their interpretation prevailed there would be no difference between intercession and authority except in the words themselves. Actually they would be one and the same thing since they have the same effect without any other requirement except the will of the pope. Why does not the pope keep quiet about intercession and stop compelling us to understand by intercession something else than power?

Once again I declare, dear reader, that I am speaking about that very same intercession as if there really were such a thing. I have expressed previously the opinion that I doubt and do not understand whether there is or could be that kind of intercession. I repeat this here so that no one may imagine that I am contradicting myself when I appear to accept intercession here and have almost denied it previously.

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.

I have not read any credible account concerning these two men. Yet I have heard it said that they could have been freed by their own merits if they had wished to be satisfied with achieving lesser glory. So they endured purgatory rather than impair the glory of the beatific vision. But in these matters anyone may believe whatever he wants to, it makes no difference to me. I have not denied that souls suffer other punishments in purgatory, as I have said above; but I wanted to show that they would not fly from purgatory to heaven even with these remissions unless they were made perfectly healthy by grace. Nevertheless it is possible that some out of very great love of God do not wish to be freed from purgatory. Thus it is understandable that Paul and Moses could have desired to be anathematized and eternally separated from God [Cf. Rom. 9:3 and Exod. 32:32]. If they were prompted to do such things in this life, it does not appear as though we could deny that the same could also be done by the dead. There is an example in the sermons of Tauler of a certain virgin who did just that.

30

No one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition, much less of having received plenary remission.

I say this in the same sense as those who desire to make contrition necessary for the remission of punishments, and yet do not see how very uncertain they render everything. The thesis is clear enough. Everybody accepts the first part

and the second part necessarily follows. In my opinion, however, remission of punishments specified by canon law can be effected with certainty even if a person were neither worthy nor contrite. It is not contrition, much less the certainty of contrition, that is required for the remission of punishments. Remission itself takes place even if it is granted for imaginary punishments, since it is merely a matter of papal authority. But, as I have also said previously, if my opponents desire to have punishments other than those for crime remitted, that is to say, for any kind of mortal sins whatever, they make indulgences worthless while magnifying them. Actually indulgences are not indulgences if they are uncertain. Indulgences are indeed uncertain if they depend upon contrition for all mortal sins and not evident crimes only, since no one is sure that he is without mortal sin. Yet he can be sure that he is without crime, that is, without a sin for which he can be accused publicly in the church, as stated above. So I deny that this thesis is true when I speak in my own sense of the term. I have maintained this, however, in order that those who oppose me might see the absurdity of their boastfulness, by means of which they expand indulgences.

31

The man who actually buys indulgences is as rare as he who is really penitent; indeed, he is exceedingly rare.

Again I speak in their sense in order that they may see the presumptuousness, indeed the contradiction, of their unrestrained preaching. When they cry that indulgences are profitable for so many people and yet confess that there are so few who walk the narrow way, they do not even blush or give attention to what they are saying. But this is not surprising. They have not assumed the office of teaching contrition and the narrow way [Matt. 7:14]. Therefore I advance the opinion that, if only a few are contrite, nevertheless many, indeed everybody in the whole church could be set free from the punishments of the canons, as they actually are now, simply by abolishing the canons.

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.⁶¹

I maintain this thesis and prove it in the following way:

Jeremiah 17[:5] says: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm." We have no other hope of salvation except in Jesus Christ alone, "nor is there any other name given under heaven, by which we must be saved" [Acts 4:12; cf. Acts 15:11]. May the hope that is based upon dead letters and on the name of indulgences and intercessions perish!

Secondly, as I have said, letters and indulgences do not confer salvation, but only take away punishments, that is, canonical punishments, and not even all of these. Oh that the earth and all its fulness would cry out and weep with me over the manner in which Christian people are seduced who have no other understanding of indulgences except that they are useful for salvation and for the fruits of the spirit! It is no wonder that this is so, since the plain truth of the matter is not made clear to them.

Oh unhappy Christians, who can trust for their salvation neither in their merits nor in their good conscience! They are taught to put their confidence in a signed parchment and sealing wax. Why should I not speak in such a manner? What else, I ask, is conferred by indulgences? Not contrition, not faith, not grace, but only the remission of punishments of the outer man which have been established by the canons.

To digress just a little: I myself have heard that there are many who, after their money was given and their letters purchased, placed their complete confidence in these indulgences. For (as they said) either they heard these things about indulgences or else (I believe this to their credit) they must have understood that the preachers of indulgences taught these things. I am not censuring anyone, for I should not do so since I have not heard the indulgence preachers. As far as I am concerned, they may excuse themselves until they become whiter than snow. Surely these people must be reproved for having wax in their ears that they hear only pernicious things when these preachers tell them salutary things. This occurs when these preachers say, for example, "Above all, brothers, believe in Christ, trust in him and repent, take up your cross, follow Christ, mortify your flesh, learn not to be afraid of punishments and death. Above all else, love one another, serve one another even by neglecting indulgences. Minister first to the needs of the poor and the destitute" [I Pet. 4:8-11]. I say that when they are preaching these and similar pious, religious, and holy matters, the gullible populace, turned aside as it were by a strange miracle, hears entirely different things, namely, things like these: "Oh you senseless and stupid people, almost more like beasts than men, who are not aware of such a great outpouring of grace! See now how heaven is open on all sides! If you do not enter now, when will you ever enter? See how many souls you can redeem! O hard-hearted and indifferent people! For twelve denarii you can release your father from purgatory, and are you so ungrateful that you would not come to the aid of your parent who is in the midst of such great punishment? I myself deserve to be excused at

the final judgment, but you stand accused all, the more since you have neglected such great salvation [Cf. Heb. 2:3]. I tell you, that if you had only one tunic, in my judgment you should tear it from your body and sell it piece by piece in order that you might obtain such great favors.” But then when the point has come to discuss those who speak against the grace given through indulgence, while they gush forth with nothing but benedictions, the crowd stands trembling and is afraid that heaven will crash to the ground and that the earth will open up.

The people hear that punishments far worse than those of hell threaten them, so that it is probably true that when those preachers curse, God blesses by means of their curses, and when they bless, God curses. For how else could it happen that these preachers speak things that are so different from what the people hear? Who can understand it? Where, I ask, do those hobgoblin words come from?⁶² I still do not believe all the things which the populace says it has heard here and there. Otherwise I would consider the ideas which they preach heretical, wicked, and blasphemous.

I do not believe it is true that one of them prohibits burials of the dead and the invitation of the priests to be made until those who want funeral rites, masses, and festivals for the dead to be conducted drop more money into the chest. The people make up these things also. I do not believe that story which is said to have been brought back by a certain person and embellished with lies, namely, that in a certain place thousands of souls (I don't know how many; if I remember correctly, it was either three or five thousand) were redeemed by means of these indulgences. Of these thousands of people only three were condemned; and they were condemned because they withheld indulgence money. No one actually said this, but while the preachers were telling the story of Christ's passion the crowd heard such things, or else they afterwards imagined that they had heard it. I do not believe it is true that these preachers of indulgences indiscriminately grant to coachmen, landlords, and servants indulgences for four, five, or as many souls as they want instead of paying them with money.

I do not believe it when the people say that, after the preachers have poured forth their exhortations with violent bellowing from their pulpits that the people put their money in the chest, they shout, ‘Deposit, deposit, deposit’ (for the people imagine that this is the head and the tail [Isa. 9:14], indeed even the very heart, of the sermon and almost the whole sermon itself). And I do not believe that then, in order that the apostolic preachers may teach the message of indulgences not only with words but also by example, they come down from their pulpits, go first of all to the collection box so that everyone can see, all the while stirring up and provoking the simple and foolish people in the hope of sucking out their very marrow, then deposit their own coin in a magnificent gesture with a resounding ring, wonder whether all the others will let their whole lifesavings flow in, smile at those who do deposit their coins, and become indignant at those who refuse to do so. I myself do not say that they have a corner on the soul-market. I am indignant at the people who because of their ignorance not only interpret such pious efforts as an appearance of greed but as a greed that reaches frenzy. Nevertheless it appears to me that the people who accept from these new spirits either a new interpretation or error perhaps deserve to be pardoned, although they have in former times been accustomed to hearing those things which pertain to love and humility.

But if I wanted to draw up a catalogue of all the monstrosities I have heard about, a new volume would be necessary. My own opinion is that even if indulgences were enjoined and salutary, nevertheless, because they have now been so terribly abused and reduced to such a scandal, this would be reason enough for abolishing them altogether. If they are permitted to thrive much longer, those who preach them will, because of their love for money, finally become insane. I honestly believe that the indulgence preachers have not said all the things which have been reported about them here and there. But at least they should have set the people right and expressed themselves more clearly, or, better still, they should speak moderately about indulgences in accordance with the wording of the canons.

33

Men must especially be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to him.

I should have called them destructive heretics. For what is more impious and heretical than to say that papal indulgences are a means of grace whereby one is reconciled with God? Yet in order to suppress my displeasure, I wish rather to believe that they have spoken or maintained such things, not out of malice or design, but only out of ignorance and for want of learning and ability. Even in this respect it is presumptuous for men who are so ignorant not to take up the work of a herdsman, rather than take upon themselves the work of teaching the people of Christ.

Let us now listen to that herdsman as he grunts his words. After he has divided indulgences into four principal graces and many other lesser graces, he has this to say in his pamphlet: ‘The first principal grace,’ he says, ‘is the plenary remission of all sins. There is no grace which can be called greater than this. By means of this, one who is a sinner and is deprived of divine grace obtains perfect remission and the grace of God anew.’⁶³ That is what he says. I ask you, what bilgewater of heresies has ever been spoken so heretically as that? One can see from this how it happens that when the

indulgence preachers say they teach the most sacred truths, the people nevertheless take them to mean the most wicked things. Would that we had here someone with the zeal and the eloquence of a St. Jerome! I am ashamed of a presumptuousness so great that this babbler has not hesitated to publish his pamphlet with four outstanding universities in the immediate vicinity, as though the astute minds of the universities were completely turned into stinking mushrooms. It grieves me also that our neighboring heretics, the Picardi,⁶⁴ finally have an occasion for justly accusing the Roman church, if they should hear that these things are taught in it.

Moreover, the fact that this insolent author has spoken not out of malice, perhaps, but out of ignorance, may be seen by this statement of his: "Through this (that is, the first grace, plenary remission) man obtains perfect remission." What does he mean when he says, "Through plenary remission one obtains perfect remission and through the grace of God he obtains the grace of God?" Is he dreaming in the throes of a fever or is he laboring under a madness? Note well this heretical opinion! He wishes to say that nothing can be called greater than this first grace, and that man, deprived of grace, obtains it. It is evident that this cannot be understood to be anything but the justifying grace of the Spirit, and he himself would not have understood it otherwise. Else it would not be true that no grace can be called greater. If, however, he should say other things concerning justifying grace he would speak in a most wicked manner, since it is God alone about whom it can be said that nothing is greater. Unlike the archbishop of Mainz, St. Augustine says that among created gifts nothing is greater than love.⁶⁵ But here this author, who is capable of such an opinion or error, confuses the grace of God and the grace of the pope in the chaos of a single word.

There follow in the same book these words: "Through this remission of sins the punishments which should be endured in purgatory because of the offense against the divine majesty are also fully remitted for him and the said punishments of purgatory are completely canceled." We have heard a Delphic oracle! He who is completely ignorant has absolutely no doubt at all. He makes a positive pronouncement concerning the power of the keys over purgatory. But we have already said enough about these things.

In the same place there follow these words: "Even though, to merit such grace, nothing can be done that is worthy enough to repay it, because the gift and grace of God cannot be appraised, etc..." See how he again calls that which the pope remits the inestimable gift and grace of God. This is the person most capable of teaching the churches, that is, the prostitute of heretics! After he has diligently used these words to garnish this grace for purposes of business and profit, he quickly clothes his Mercury with the garment of Jupiter so that no one may know that he is after money, especially if the person knows no more than he himself. He also permits that grace to be given free to the poor, but only if they have first tried in every way to rake up money from what he calls "good patrons." In this way even mendicant brothers may obtain money without the authority of their superiors. Like Pseudolus,⁶⁶ this liar considers the remission of even imaginary punishment far better than salvatory obedience. But since there was no way open for raking in money, in order to obtain (*redimant*) this grace (that is, "buy it anew"; not that they actually sell it, but the great similarity of terms compels them to misuse the words), this liar goes on to say, "The kingdom of heaven ought to be no more open to the rich than to the poor." Once again he wants to open heaven by means of indulgences. But I must restrain my pen so that I do not rave against them the way they deserve it. I have done enough by indicating to the faithful that the corruptness of their sermons assumes such remarkable ignorance and crudeness on their part. Once again, the proverb has proven itself to be true: "The cover fits the dish."

34

For the graces of indulgences are concerned only with the penalties of sacramental satisfaction established by man.

This is clear enough from the fifth and twentieth theses.

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.

I ask you, why do they subject men to the danger of putting off repentance? And what good does it do them to have such things preached, even if they were true, unless it is because they seek money instead of the salvation of souls? Since these doctrines are wicked and false there is all the more reason for rejecting them. To be sure I have admitted previously that punishments can be remitted even to those who are not truly repentant. These teachers deny this. Here again, that which they affirm I believe must be denied. And I have the same conviction concerning letters of confession as I do concerning punishments, that is, that true repentance is not required for either one, neither with regard to their redemption nor their use. They deny this. The same thing is true in the matter of remitting punishments, since the remis-

sion belongs to the content of the letter of confession. But in the matter of redeeming souls from punishment I disagree completely and ask them to prove what they say.

Indeed, I believe there is a big difference between redeeming souls and the remission of punishments. In the remissions of punishment one receives good, but in the redemption of souls one does good. Moreover, the wicked man can receive good, but by no means can he do good. And the work of the wicked man cannot be pleasing to God if the man himself is not pleasing to God, as Gen. 4[:4] says: "The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering." It is contrary to Scripture for anyone to pity another rather than his own soul, and for anyone to pluck out the speck from his brother's eye rather than the beam from his own eye [Matt. 7:3]. And it is altogether contrary to Scripture for a servant of the devil to redeem a child of God and do this even in the name of God himself. It is ridiculous for an enemy to intercede for a friend of the king. What kind of madness is this? To magnify the remission of worthless punishment which is unprofitable for salvation, they play down the importance of sins for which penance alone should be magnified. If this is not heretical, ill-sounding, scandalous, and offensive to pious ears, what other term could be applied to these horrible things? Or are the inquisitors of heretical depravity harassing and wearing down orthodox people and orthodox ideas under these pretexts so that they alone may be permitted to flood the world with heresies without fear of punishment and as they please?

The indulgence sellers say, however, that redemption rests not upon the work of him who does the work of redeeming, but upon the merit of the one to be redeemed. My answer is: Who said this? From what source is it proved? Why, therefore, is not the one who must be redeemed freed by his own merit, without the work of him who does the redeeming? But then the money which they covet from the saving of souls would not increase. Why do we not call upon the Turks and Jews to contribute their money with us also, not, you understand, because of our greed, but for the redemption of souls? The fact that they are unbaptized does not pose any obstacle, for only the contributor of money matters, not at all the soul of him who is lost. The effect of the contribution depends only upon the merit of the soul to be redeemed. I believe that even if a jackass deposited gold, he would also redeem souls. If any qualification is required, surely it is grace, since a Christian who is a sinner displeases God more than any infidel. And braying does not distort the jackass as much as wickedness distorts the Christian.

Secondly, I have said that anyone can grant sinners confessional letters as well as remissions of punishments, but I have not said that they should be exhorted or even permitted to buy such things, as these hucksters teach so wickedly and crudely. I prove my argument in the following manner:

Every doctrine of Christ is an exhortation to penitence and points to the fact that men should turn from the devil, the sooner the better. As Ecclesiasticus says, "Do not delay in turning to the Lord" [Sirach 5:8]. The Lord himself says, "Watch, therefore, for you do not know the day or the hour" [Cf. Matt. 25:13]. The Apostle Paul says, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest" [Heb. 4:11]. The Apostle Peter says, "Since therefore all these things are to be destroyed, what sort of persons ought you to be in holy and pious behavior, you who hasten toward the coming of the day, etc." [Cf. II Pet. 3:11-12]. The apostles taught these things because they were eager to do so, not for the purpose of collecting money, but for saving souls.

These false teachers, however, with complete self-confidence granted the people deferment in a miserable manner, and, as far as they were concerned, left them in danger of eternal death. I do not know, therefore, whether or not those who have desired to keep people in such anxiety should be excused from the crime of murdering souls. Surely in this case it is not the salvation of the giver which is sought, but rather his gift, even if he perishes. If they were good shepherds of souls and true Christians, they would endeavor with every effort to guide the sinner to the fear of God and a dread of sin, and not discontinue with weeping, praying, admonishing, and rebuking until they had won the soul of a brother. But if a person were to continue to give money and persist in doing evil, these hucksters should throw the money in his face and say with the Apostle, "I seek not what is yours but you" [II Cor. 12:14]. And again they would say, "Your money perish with you" [Acts 8:20]. Whereupon they would shrink back from him with horror. In that respect they would treat him rightly. But this is a far cry from our Mercury⁶⁷ who says, "Nay, rather we shall do this: if sinners come to us trusting in capable mediators (by which they mean money), they may be one of us, able to do what we can do, even able to redeem souls, even if this is contrary to Christ and the apostles. And while they immediately perish we shall laugh and rejoice because we are sure of their gift. This is love for the people of Christ and for our brothers. In this manner we take care of their souls so that they may know our newest kind of compassion for them in their sins, that is, no compassion at all."

36

Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even, without indulgence letters.

Otherwise, those who did not have letters of that type would be in danger. This is a false assumption, since these letters are neither commanded nor recommended, but may be freely accepted or rejected. By the same token those who

neglect to purchase them do not thereby sin, nor are they for that reason in danger of losing their salvation. From this it is evident that such people are already following God's commands. In the event that a remission such as this were not granted a man, it would nevertheless be due to him, as the pope says. But at this point there are those who interpose a very subtle objection, saying, this would be true if the canons were punishments imposed only by the pope; but the canons are declarations of the punishments inflicted by God. It behooves those to speak thus who have undertaken to persecute the truth once and for all with a perpetual hatred.

First, they declare, as if by an oracle, that God requires a punishment which makes satisfaction for sins, namely, punishment other than the evangelical cross, that is, fasts, labors, vigils, and other than the punishment of chastisement. They do not understand these as among evangelical punishments, for they cannot deny that such punishments are remitted by God alone.

Second, they add to this monstrosity an even greater one, namely, that the canons only declare punishment which is imposed by God. Therefore the pope uses only declarative power; he never imposes or removes punishment. Otherwise, contrary to the word of Christ, these indulgence sellers would teach us something like this: "Whatsoever I shall bind, you shall loose."

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.

It is impossible for one to be a Christian unless he possesses Christ. If he possesses Christ, he possesses at the same time all the benefits of Christ. For the holy Apostle says in Rom. 13[:14], "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." And in Rom. 8[:32] he says, "Will he not also give us all things with him?" And in I Cor. 3[:21 -22] he says, "All things are yours, whether Cephas or Paul, or life or death." And in I Cor. 12 [Cf. :27] he says, "You are not your own, but individually members of the body." And in other places, where he describes the church as one body, one bread; we are altogether in Christ, members one of another [Cf. I Cor. 10:17]. And in the Song of Solomon we read, "My beloved is mine and I am his" [Song of Sol. 2:16]. By faith in Christ, a Christian is made one spirit and one body with Christ. "For the two shall be one flesh" [Gen. 2:24]. "This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church" [Eph. 5:31 -32].

Therefore, since the spirit of Christ dwells within Christians, by means of which brothers become co-heirs, one body, and citizens of Christ, how is it possible for us not to be participants in all the benefits of Christ? Christ himself has all that belongs to him from the same Spirit. So it happens through the inestimable riches of the mercies of God the Father, that a Christian can be glorified with Christ and can with confidence claim all things in Christ. Righteousness, strength, patience, humility, even all the merits of Christ are his through the unity of the Spirit by faith in him. All his sins are no longer his; but through that same unity with Christ everything is swallowed up in him. And this is the confidence that Christians have and our real joy of conscience, that by means of faith our sins become no longer ours but Christ's upon whom God placed the sins of all of us. He took upon himself our sins [Cf. Isa. 53:12]. Christ himself is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" [John 1:29]. All the righteousness of Christ becomes ours. He places his hand upon us and all is well with us [Cf. Mark 5:23]. He spreads his cloak and covers us [Cf. Ruth 3:9], blessed Savior throughout all ages, Amen.⁶⁸

Indeed, this most pleasant participation in the benefits of Christ and joyful change of life do not take place except by faith. Moreover, no man gives this or takes it away. Since this is so, I think it is sufficiently clear that this participation is not granted by the power of the keys or by the benefit of letters of indulgence. Rather it is granted by God alone before and without these indulgences. Just as remission is granted by God before the remission of the church, absolution before the absolution of the church, so also is participation in the benefits of Christ granted before participation in the benefits which the pope confers.

What, therefore, does the pope impart by granting his participation? My answer is: They should say, as I have said in Thesis 6 about remission, that he grants permission only in a declarative way. I confess that I do not understand how they could say it otherwise. I shall give my interpretation in the thesis which follows.

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.

The declaration which is made in the form of public letters of indulgences is not necessary, for the declaration which is made in private confession is sufficient. But this public declaration should not be despised for by means of it the declaration which is made privately is made known also to the church and is approved. I think it must be understood in

this manner. Whoever has some better explanation to offer should say so. I do not see what else public dispensation may accomplish. Although I believe that this thesis has been accepted by everybody, nevertheless I have said in Thesis 6 above that I do not like to say that the pope does nothing more than declare or approve the divine remission or granting of Christ's benefits, first, because this is the same as declaring that the keys of the church are virtually worthless. In fact, in a manner of speaking, it makes the word of Christ of no effect when he says, "Whatsoever etc." [Matt. 16:19]. To speak of it as a "declaration" is too modest a statement. Second, I do not like to speak in this manner, for then the one to whom the declaration is made would be uncertain about everything, even though his remission and reconciliation would be confirmed publicly before others and openly before the church.

Here I wish to maintain about participation in the blessings of the church that which I have maintained previously about the remission of guilt, until I have been taught something better.

I believe that just as a man who has sinned trusts with the greatest difficulty in the mercy of God, so the sin which lies heavily upon him as a burden forces him to despair and he is prone to think much more about the wrath than the mercy of God. On the other hand, before he has sinned he is prone to think much more about mercy than wrath. Man does everything the wrong way. He is afraid when he should not be afraid but hopeful, that is, after he has sinned. Before he has sinned he is confident, when he should not be confident but be afraid.

An example of this human perversity has been adequately pointed out in the resurrection of Christ, where Christ needed to give many proofs in order to establish himself again in the hearts of the disciples. The first announcement of his resurrection was made to women, and the disciples looked upon it as an absurdity. Just so the first stage of trust appears effeminate to the sinner and as something which he should consider entirely, or at least almost, incredible. By the same token it is much more difficult for him to believe that he is a participant in the benefits of Christ, that is, indescribable benefits, and "partaker in the divine nature" [II Pet. 1:4], as St. Peter says. The magnitude of these benefits even produces a distrust, which is nourished by the fact that he not only has such great evils remitted, but such great benefits conferred upon him, such as being made a child of God, an heir of the kingdom, a brother of Christ, a companion of the angels, a lord of the world. I ask you, how can one believe that these things are true, when by the gnawing of his sin, indeed overwhelmed by the burden of it, he feels that he is being carried away to hell? In this respect, therefore, the judgment of the keys is necessary, so that a man may not believe in himself, but rather trust in the judgment of the keys of the church, that is, of the priest. And it makes no difference to me if the one who bears the keys is unlearned or flippant. He may believe, not on account of the priest or his authority, but on account of the word of him who said and did not lie, "Whatsoever thou shalt loose etc." [Matt. 16:19]. For those who believe in that word, the authority of the keys cannot err. The keys err only for those who do not believe that the absolution of the priest is valid.

Suppose, by some impossible or accidental circumstances, that someone were not sufficiently penitent or else did not think he was, and yet believed with absolute confidence that he was absolved by the one who does the pardoning. I personally believe this is possible. That man's very faith causes him to be truly pardoned, for he believes in him who said, "Whatsoever etc." [Matt. 16:19]. Moreover, faith in Christ always justifies, even if an inept, irresponsible, and inexperienced priest baptizes you. Furthermore, even if you do not think you are penitent enough (for you cannot and ought not trust yourself), nevertheless, if you believe in him who said, "He who believes and, is baptized will be saved" [Mark 16:16], I tell you, faith in that word of Christ makes you truly baptized, whatever feeling you may have about your penitence.

So faith is necessary everywhere. You receive as much as you believe. And this is what I understand it to mean when our teachers say that the sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, not because of the mere fact that the sacrament is performed but because it is believed, as St. Augustine contends⁶⁹ and as I have said previously. So also here. Absolution is efficacious, not by the mere fact that it takes place, no matter who finally does it and whether he errs or does not err, but because it is believed. And no reservation of certain cases [by the pope] can hinder this faith from receiving absolution, unless the faith itself should be manifestly undeserving or despise the absolution. So I say that when a man is in sin he is so vexed and disturbed by his conscience that in his own opinion he believes that he is participating in everything that is evil. Such a man is certainly close to justification and has the beginning of grace. Therefore he ought to flee for refuge to the consolation of the keys in order to be quieted by the authority of the priest, obtain peace, and attain the confidence that he is participating in all, the benefits of Christ and the church. But if anyone shall not believe that this man participates in the benefits of Christ and the church through this work of absolution by the priest or should have doubts about it, he is led astray not by an error of the keys but by the error of his own faithlessness, inflicts upon his soul great condemnation, and does to God and his Word both an injustice and the greatest irreverence. So it is much better for him not to go to the absolution at all, if he does not believe that he is absolved, than it is to go without faith. For if he goes without faith he approaches half-heartedly and thereby receives "judgment upon himself" [I Cor. 11:29], as he would if he were to receive baptism or the sacrament of the bread half-heartedly. Therefore penitence is not as necessary as faith. In this respect faith in absolution receives incomparably more benefit than does zeal in penitence.

In neglecting this faith most of us only strive toward nurturing penitence. We teach men to trust in the remission of sins in proportion to their feeling of penitence. This means they are taught never to trust in the remission of sins but to strive for despair. According to the prophet we ought to place our hope in Christ's word, not in our penitence. The Psalmist did not say, "Remember my contrition to thy servant, in which thou hast made me hope," but "Remember thy word. . . in which thou hast made me hope" [Ps. 119:49]. Again he says, "In thy word [certainly not in our own word] have I placed great hope" [Cf. Ps. 119:81]. In another psalm he says, "My soul is sustained by his word," etc. [Cf. Ps. 130:5]. And according to the Hebrew he says in Psalm 51[:4], "Against thee, only, have I sinned, . . . wherefore thou wilt justify me by thy word." Therefore it is neither the sacrament nor the priest, but faith in the word of Christ spoken through the priest and his office which justifies you. What difference does it make to you, if the Lord should speak through an ass, either male or female, as long as you hear that word by which you may hope and believe?

I would interpret what our scholastic teachers⁷⁰ say, namely that the sacraments of the church are given to us to be used, as the inestimable gifts of God by means of which we have an opportunity to believe and be justified. Formerly, in the time of Saul, the word of the Lord was considered precious [I Sam. 3:1]. Now his word comes to you even through most irresponsible, wretched, and unlearned men. Pay attention to the word and dismiss the outward appearance of the person. Whether the person errs or does not err, you shall not err if you believe God's word. If I err at this point and sound foolish, let him who understands put me straight again.

It will follow from these things which I have said that the three truths of Jean Gerson,⁷¹ which for some time now have gotten into all books and ears, must be understood prudently. Take, for example, this statement of his, that a man should not trust himself as being in a state of salvation because he can say that he is sorry for his sins; rather he should direct his attention to whether or not he longs for the sacrament of absolution so much that when he has received it he believes he is absolved. This is what he means by receiving the sacrament with longing, that is, by faith in the word which one actually hears or desires to hear. Take care, therefore, that you do not in any manner trust in your own contrition but completely and alone in the word of your kindest and most faithful Savior, Jesus Christ! Your heart may deceive you, but he will not deceive you, whether you have him or only desire him. If these words are not understood intelligently (and may the Lord God grant that, in the words of the prophet Micah, I may be a man who is without the Spirit and rather speaks lies [Mic. 2:11]), then I am afraid many souls will be lost because of those most unlearned men who babble about works and contrition. They are blunderers, first, because they do not teach faith in the word but rather contrition, and even this superficially. Secondly, because they are so quick to dole out absolutions and to grant participation in the blessings of the church in the same manner, as though everybody everywhere has that faith. And they do not inquire whom they absolve or why.

Therefore it is not as necessary to ask when a person is absolved, "Are you sorry?" as it is to ask, "Do you believe that you can be absolved by me?" In the same manner Christ asked the blind men, "Do you believe that I am able to do this for you?" [Matt. 9:28]. "All things are possible to him who believes" [Mark 9:23]. The sure proof of this faith is seen especially in the case of those who are disturbed by a trembling conscience and feel that they cannot trust in themselves. But for those who do not feel such wretchedness, I do not know whether the keys are their comforters or not, since only those who are sorry deserve to be comforted. And the only one who should be urged to have faith that his sins are remitted is the one who trembles in the fear that his sins might be retained.

To bring this thesis to a close, I say that I do not believe this opinion of mine lessens the power of the keys, of which I have been accused, but rather restores it from a false honor and tyrannical reverence to a place of worthy and loving esteem. It is no wonder if the keys are held in contempt when they are offered to those who receive them with hollow respect, i.e., with intimidation; yet anyone who knows of their most salutary benefit would be a stone or blockhead if he were not to embrace and kiss them with tears of joy. Why, therefore, do we exalt the pope because of the keys and at the same time think of him as a power-hungry individual? The keys are not his but mine, given to me for my salvation, my consolation, bestowed to grant peace and rest. With respect to the keys, the pope is my servant and minister. As pope he does not need the keys, but I do. These flatterers turn everything over to the popes, thereby extolling, not our need of consolation, but their own power. By so doing, they terrify us by the same power with which we should be consoled. Today everything is completely topsy-turvy, and yet we do not think that these are unhappy times when the best things are so abused as to be turned into the worst things for us. So, as it stands, I do not maintain this thesis in its entirety, but deny a large part of it.

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.

The reason for this thesis is found in the following thesis.

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.

Look at a true penitent and you will see that he seeks revenge upon himself so ardently for his offense against God that he compels you to have mercy upon him. In fact it is even necessary to dissuade him, lest he destroy himself, as we have often read and seen it happen. St. Jerome writes that such a thing happened to his Paula and even to himself.⁷² No punishment is enough for such individuals, so with the prodigal son they invoke heaven and earth and even God himself against themselves. David did this when he said, ‘Let thy sword, I beseech you, be turned against me and against my father’s house’ (Cf. II Sam. 24:17).

Therefore I believe that I have spoken correctly when I say that canonical penances are imposed only upon those who are sluggards and do not wish to do better or to test the sincerity of their contrition. One can see how difficult it is even for the learned to take a middle course between hatred and love of punishments; to teach people to hate them and yet do it in such a manner that the people are persuaded to love them. But since nothing is difficult for the unlearned, there is nothing to prevent this from being easy also. But the gospel teaches us not to escape the punishments or to relax them but to seek and love them, for it teaches the spirit of freedom and the fear of God to the point of showing contempt for all punishments. But it is far more lucrative and profitable to the moneybags of the indulgence treasurers for people to fear punishments and drink in the spirit of the world and of fear in the letter of the law and in servitude. At the same time the people hear that some canonical punishments are such horrible things that they can be avoided only with great zeal, expense, pomp, and ceremonies.

They are taught these matters with more zeal than they are taught to love the gospel.

The following question is raised:

‘What do you say, then, about those who make pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, St. James,⁷³ Aachen, Trier, and many other regions and places to obtain indulgences? Also what do you say about indulgences bestowed at the dedications of churches?’

My answer is:

Those who make pilgrimages do so for many reasons, very seldom for legitimate ones. The first reason for making pilgrimages is the most common of all, namely, the curiosity to see and hear strange and unknown things. This levity proceeds from a loathing for and boredom with the worship services, which have been neglected in the pilgrims’ own church. Otherwise one would find incomparably better indulgences at home than in all the other places put together. Furthermore, he would be closer to Christ and the saints if he were not so foolish as to prefer sticks and stones to the poor and his neighbors whom he should serve out of love. And he would be closer to Christ also if he were to provide for his own family.

The second reason for making pilgrimages is bearable, namely, for the sake of indulgences. Since indulgences are voluntary, have not been commanded, and therefore have no merit, surely those who make pilgrimages only for the sake of indulgences merit nothing at all. Moreover, those people are to be justifiably ridiculed who neglect Christ and neighbor at home, in order to spend ten times as much money away from home without having any results and merit to show for it. Therefore he who would remain at home and consider that passage of Scripture, ‘Love covers a multitude of sins’ [I Pet. 4:8], as well as that other passage, ‘Whatever is left over, give as alms, and behold everything is clean for you’ (Cf. Luke 11:41), would be doing far better – indeed, he would be doing the only right thing – than if he were to bring home all the indulgences from Jerusalem and Rome. But there is no pleasure in being so wise, so we shall surrender ‘our hearts to impurity’ [Cf. Rom. 1:24].

The third reason for making pilgrimages is a longing for affliction and labor for one’s sin, which, I believe, rarely occurs, at least by itself. To satisfy that desire, a man could torture himself and labor at home, if it were labor only that he sought. Yet if he does this, it is not evil but good.

The fourth reason is an honest one, namely, if a man is motivated by a singular devotion for the honor of the saints, the glory of God, and his own edification, just as St. Lucia made a pilgrimage to St. Agatha⁷⁴ and some of the holy fathers made a pilgrimage to Rome. The result proved that they did not do this out of curiosity.

Accordingly, in such cases as these, I am glad that the vows made to go on such pilgrimages are commuted to other works. Would that they were commuted gratis!

41

Papal indulgences must be preached with caution, lest people erroneously think that they are preferable to other good works of love.

I would say this to people: Look, brothers, you ought to know that there are three types of good works which can be done by expending money. The first and foremost consists of giving to the poor or lending to a neighbor who is in need and in general of coming to the aid of anyone who suffers, whatever may be his need. This work ought to be done with such earnestness that even the building of churches must be interrupted and the taking of offerings for the purchase of holy vessels and for the decoration of churches be discontinued. After this has been done and there is no longer anyone who is in need, then should follow the second type, namely, contributing to the building of our churches and hospitals in our country, then to buildings of public service. However, after this has been done, then, finally, if you so desire, you may give, in the third place, for the purchase of indulgences. The first type of good work has been commanded by Christ; there is no divine command for the last type.

If you should say, “With that type of preaching very little money would be collected through indulgences,” I answer, I believe that. But what is so strange about that, since popes by means of indulgences do not seek money but the salvation of souls, as is evident in those indulgences which they bestow at the consecration of churches and altars? So they do not wish, through their indulgences, to hinder the better things, but rather to promote charity.

I say very frankly that whoever teaches people otherwise and reverses this order is not a teacher but a seducer of people, unless people, because of their sins, at times do not deserve to hear the truth rightly preached.

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.

As I have said I understand the pope as a public person, that is, as he speaks to us through the canons. And there are no canons which preach that the value of indulgences is to be compared to works of mercy.

The thesis, moreover, is clear. A command of God has infinitely more value than that which is permitted to exist by man’s word and is in no way commanded by God. The command of God has merit. What man decrees has none.

The objection is made here: “But indulgences are sold for a godly work, for example, for a contribution to a building or for the ransom of captives. Therefore they are meritorious.”

My answer is: I am not speaking about the work, but about the indulgences. Such a work as that could have been done without indulgences, for it is not necessarily bound up with indulgences. Moreover, indulgences which are bestowed without good works confer nothing; they only detract. The work, however, without indulgences does confer something. In the former case we receive benefits for ourselves, in the latter we give them. The former serves the flesh, the latter serves the spirit. Briefly the former satisfies our nature, the latter satisfies the grace of God. Therefore indulgences in themselves are not comparable to a work of mercy.

Likewise a work without indulgences is purer than one with indulgences. Indulgences are somewhat of an imperfection of the work, for the work receives its own reward, indeed much more than its own reward. Therefore people would act in a holier manner if they simply made a contribution for a good work and not for the sake of indulgences. It is not that indulgences in themselves are evil and harmful, but that the perverted abuse of indulgences is harmful, since people would not do such a work of mercy if no indulgences were granted for it. So in this type of work the indulgence becomes the end pursued – indeed a man who looks out for his own interests becomes that end. Man ought rather to do a work of mercy freely and for the sake of God. And he ought to accept only those indulgences which are given to him freely, and not as the result of a financial contribution that he has made. Thus a man should not buy indulgences and the church should not sell them. For both it must be a free gift or it will become a clear case of simony⁷⁵ and a foul transaction. But who explains these things to the people when the indulgence sellers say, “Contribute freely, and I will give the indulgence freely.”

At the same time one must fear that by such a perversion of the order of indulgences and works a great idolatry may be perpetrated in the church. If the public is taught to contribute money in order to escape punishment (which I hope does not happen, even though many people probably understand it in this way), then it is evident that they are not contributing for God’s sake, and the fear of punishments, or the punishment itself, is their idol to which they sacrifice. But if such a thing should happen, then such an evil would arise in the church as at one time arose among the pagan Romans when they sacrificed to Febris⁷⁶ and other little and harmful deities so that no harm could come to them. So we must be ever watchful for the sake of the people and scarcely entrust such doubtful and dangerous matters to the most learned scholars.

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.

I state this thesis for the benefit of the ignorant, for it is clear enough from what was said previously. I am not the first or the only one, however, who holds this thesis along with the two which precede it and the two which follow, for everybody, including the whole church, accepts them, except that the people alone never get to hear these things. Perhaps there is a fear that such a clear and basic truth might be understood too readily. Even when St. Bonaventura and all the others discussed this matter among themselves, and the objection was raised, "Then the other good works must be omitted," they answer unanimously, "Not at all, for the other good works are more valuable with respect to obtaining the essential reward."⁷⁷ Therefore my thesis holds, since those who say this nevertheless assert that indulgences are a treasury of the merits of Christ and the church.

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.

This is self-evident. Only remission of punishment is granted by indulgences, and these indulgences have no more usefulness, as everyone recognizes, than to take away punishments. But the taking away of punishment does not make one good or better in the exercise of love.

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.

By doing this a man reverses the order mentioned previously and acts contrary to that passage in John: "If anyone sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" [I John 3:17]. Our sophists, however, interpret this need that the Scripture mentions as one of extreme necessity, that is, when there is no opportunity given for showing love, or very little opportunity. Yet if these sophists themselves were in superficial need rather than in extreme need, they would want to be helped. But they want to help others only after the latter have already given up the spirit. What wonderful theologians and Christians they are, who do not do for others that which they want done for themselves [Matt. 7:12].

46⁷⁸

Christians are to be taught that the buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.

I have said repeatedly that indulgences belong to the list of those things which are permissible, not, however, to those which are profitable. They are permitted in the same manner as the certificate of divorce [Deut. 24:1-4] and the offering for jealousy [Num. 5:15] were permitted in the Old Testament. By the same token disputes and law suits for the sake of the weak are permitted in the New Testament, "because of your hardness of heart" [Matt. 19:8], as Christ says. Whoever purchases indulgences, however, will be tolerated rather than commended, as the gloss says, Book V, *Concerning Penance and Remission*, in the chapter beginning *Quod autem*.⁷⁹ Many others would do better to make satisfaction rather than purchase indulgences, since only criminals need to purchase indulgences.

47

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.

The Apostle says: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" [I Tim. 5:8]. But there are many who have neither bread nor proper clothing and yet, led astray by the din and noise of the preachers of indulgences, rob themselves and bring about their own poverty in order to increase the wealth of the indulgence sellers.

48

Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting indulgences, needs and thus desires their devout prayer more than their money.

Our masters, the courtiers and accomplices of the Roman Curia, might laugh at this thesis. Nevertheless it is true that before anything else the pope should desire prayer from his subjects, as the Apostle Paul often did from his fellow-Christians. This is a far more just reason for granting indulgences than the building of a thousand basilicas, in that the pope, who is besieged rather than surrounded by so many monstrosities of devils and godless men, cannot err without bringing great harm upon the whole church. Especially should prayers be offered for him if he were to lend a willing ear to the pestilent voice of his sirens who say, "It is not presumed that one of such distinguished prominence should err," as well as, "All positive laws are to be found in the shrine of his heart." As a matter of fact it is presumed by people that the pope does not err, but it is questionable whether or not that is a good presumption. And indeed, all his laws are to be found in the shrine of his heart; but it is questionable whether or not his heart is good, for that must be nourished by prayer. St. Bernard has written about this matter in a most attractive way to Pope Eugenius in his work, *Consideration*.⁸⁰

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.

Consider the danger of indulgences. They are preached to people directly contrary to the truth of the cross and the fear of God. Through indulgences people are granted freedom from punishments and then assurance of remissions of sins. There is every indication that indulgences, which are preached so boastfully, are not from God, for the people run after them eagerly, accept them, and even look upon them as that holy gospel of God, so that the truth of Scripture is proved which states, "For that which comes from God, the world despises; another comes in his name and the world receives him" [Cf. John 5:43]. Those who teach such fables are the cause of this error. They preach indulgences more zealously and with more pomp than they do the gospel. And the error is due also to the fact that they preach to all people those things which are only for the few. I have made it clear enough previously that pardons are relaxations, liberties, permissions, and clemencies, and they are true indulgences, if we accept the strict meaning of the term, that is, they are permissions given out of softness of heart to delicate, cold, hard Christians, that is, rather to Gibeonites, the water-carriers [Josh. 9:21, 27], and slaves, than to the leaders and children of Israel.

My proof for this thesis is this:

Even the one who does works of love fervently cannot put his trust in those works or feel sure of his salvation because he does them. Even the most holy Job feared all his works [Job 9:28], and Scripture states, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord" [Ps. 112:1] and "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord always" [Prov. 28:14]. How much the more should we accept in fear indulgences, which are of incomparably less value than such works, and place less than the least possible confidence, that is, none at all, in them! A saint is afraid that he might work less or suffer less than he should. Where does that put the sinner who has his sin remitted when he does less than he could do? And as far as I understand these prattlers of ours and these corruptors of minds, they are making indulgences a racket among us and a work of error [II Thess. 2:11] as they stalk around in darkness [Ps. 91:6]. At the same time they persuade all men to trust in these indulgences, whereas they only apply to a few people, to those who are cold and weak, as I have said. Look how they are prompted afterwards by the Holy Spirit through their own witness to call the business of St. Peter the business of the Holy Spirit, as though they were to confess that they themselves are the merchants and that they conduct simoniac market days.⁸¹

However, when I said, "indulgences are useful," I had in mind that they are useful "not for all men, but for old persons and snoring [workrighteous] laborers," because it is better for them to have the punishments remitted than to bear them unwillingly. Nevertheless, when the choice has been given them to purchase indulgences, in order to avoid a greater evil they should not rejoice as persons who feel secure or put their trust in that fact; rather, they should grieve and fear since they are the kind who, because of the possibility of a greater evil, need to be left to a lesser one. This should be clear to them when they see that even those who have made the greatest progress in goodness are afraid. For this reason I have said that indulgences are most harmful if people rejoice over such liberty without fear of God.

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.

After our "mighty hunters" have imposed a fixed sum of money upon every Christian according to his economic status, they even teach wives to go out and beg, and that against the will of the husbands. Mendicant friars are taught to scrape money together anywhere, even against the will of their superiors. This goes on until there is no one who has a

penny left in his pocket which he might contribute to this cause. Matters were carried so far, it is said, that people were exhorted even to sell their clothes or borrow anywhere.

In my opinion indulgences are the most worthless of all possessions of the church and ought to be granted only to its most worthless members. Furthermore, they are neither meritorious nor useful but, what is worse, extremely harmful if they who receive them have no sense of fear. Therefore I feel that such teaching deserves to be cursed and is contrary to the commands of God. For a wife should live under the authority of her husband and do nothing contrary to his will, even if it were meritorious to do so. Even less should she go begging for indulgences she probably does not need. Also, those in religious orders should serve in obedience, even if they otherwise could in some manner attain the martyr's crown. The pope never intends anything different, although his false interpreters do. Let someone else give vent to his anger; I shall exercise self-restraint. One thing I want to say: Learn at least, dear reader, whether they do not by their pestilential preaching make people believe that salvation and the true grace of God depend upon indulgences. Otherwise why would they commend these indulgences so zealously as to make meritorious works and the commands of God useless? Yet until now they are not considered heretics, so they may take pride in being the persecutors of heretics.

Has it been the pope's desire that men who are committed to his care be stripped to the very skin for the sake of sticks and stones? Or has it been his desire that by the pestilential doctrines of these "thieves and robbers," as Christ calls them [John 10:1], they should be slaughtered and destroyed? It was better to have him as emperor who said, "A good shepherd shears but does not skin his sheep."⁸² The indulgence sellers not only skin the people, but devour them in body and soul. "Their throat is an open sepulchre, they flatter with their tongues, etc." [Ps. 5:9].

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.

St. Ambrose melted down the sacred vessels to redeem the captives,⁸³ and St. Paulinus of Nola⁸⁴ handed himself over as a captive for the sake of his own. It is for such a purpose that the church has its gold⁸⁵ as the decretals, which have taken this from that same Ambrose, show. And now, dear God, how many there are who carry firewood, even leaves, to the forest and little drops of water to the sea, that is, their pennies to that purse, whose gain, to use the word of Jerome, is the religion of the whole world.

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.

They dare to expound this monstrous doctrine without shame in order to take away from men the fear of God and through indulgences hand them over to the wrath of God, contrary to the word of that wise one who said, "Do not be without fear concerning the propitiation for sin" [Sirach 5:5], and of the Psalmist, "Who understands his faults?" [Ps. 19:12]. But the preachers of indulgences say, "We do not take away the fear of God." If security through indulgences is compatible with the fear of God, then you do not take it away; but the people do, when they receive letters of indulgence which have been extolled with such a noisy taking of oaths. If a person is afraid that the letters of indulgence might not be sufficient before God, how can this glorious promise of security be true? But if a person is confident that they are sufficient, how can he be afraid? May every single sermon be forever damned which persuades a person to find security and trust in or through anything whatever except the pure mercy of God, which is Christ. All the saints not only fear but cry out in despair, "Do not enter into judgment with thy servant, O Lord" [Ps. 143:2]. And by those letters of indulgence you give them a sense of security and lead them to God's judgment. In answer to such unrestrained whirlpools of falsehood some have concocted a story which I believe is not completely devoid of truth. A certain dead person arrived at hell with his letters of indulgences and pleaded for freedom by virtue of those letters. The devil came to meet him and, while he was reading the letters before the heat of the fire, it devoured the wax and the parchment in his hands, and he dragged the man along with him to the depths of hell.

53

They are enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in order that indulgences may be preached in others.

It is the duty and intention of the pope to desire the Word of God to be preached above everything else, always, and everywhere as he knows he has been commanded by Christ to do. How can we believe, therefore, that he opposes Christ himself? And yet our preachers dare to believe this as well as everything else.

54

Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word.

This is clear enough from the dignity the Word of God possesses, and the necessity for preaching that Word, while the preaching of indulgences is neither necessary nor of much value.

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.

Nothing in the church must be treated with greater care than the holy gospel, since the church has nothing which is more precious and salutary. Therefore it is the only single work which Christ enjoined upon his disciples at so many different times. And Paul says that he was not sent to baptize but to preach the gospel [I Cor. 1:17]. Christ commanded that the sacrament of the Eucharist should be celebrated only in remembrance of him, and Paul says in I Cor. 11[:26], "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death." It is better to omit the sacrament than not to proclaim the gospel. The church has decided that the mass must not be celebrated without the reading of the gospel. Therefore God has placed greater importance on the gospel than on the mass, for without the gospel man does not live in the Spirit, but he does without the mass. "For man shall live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" [Cf. Matt. 4:4], as the Lord himself teaches at greater length in the sixth chapter of John. The mass then renews those who are already a part of the body of Christ, but the gospel, the sword of the Spirit, devours the flesh, divides the kingdom of the devil, takes away the possessions of the strong and increases the body of the church. The mass helps only those who have life; the gospel, on the other hand, helps everybody. Hence, in the early church, the demoniacs and catechumens⁸⁶ were permitted to remain until after the reading of the gospel and only then were dismissed by those who were permitted to eat and drink of the body of Christ in the mass. Even now church law permits those who have been excommunicated to remain at the mass until after the reading of the gospel. As John preceded Christ, so the gospel precedes the mass. The gospel prostrates and humbles, whereas the mass conveys grace to those who are humbled. Therefore it would be better if they forbade the mass [rather than silence the gospel].

But what a beautiful spectacle do you think that would be for the devils to watch, if at some time these wasters of indulgences, who especially need indulgences themselves (for example, simoniacs,⁸⁷ and those who according to the canons have fallen from grace), were to bestow them upon those who do not need indulgences at all?

56

The treasures of the church, out of which the pope distributes indulgences, are not sufficiently discussed or known among Christians.

This is the second time that I have deserved death. After I have maintained many things which have been so evident for a long time that no protest was necessary, I now must discuss them once more. So in this discussion I must deal with the most recent protest. Therefore I shall discuss here these unfamiliar matters and seek to find the truth, to which the reader, the listener, or the inquisitor of heretical depravity may be my witness.

57

That indulgences are not temporal treasures is certainly clear, for many indulgence sellers do not distribute them freely but only gather them.

Experience makes this quite clear.

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.

The substance of this thesis is very deeply rooted in and close to the heart of almost all teachers. Therefore I must test it very extensively and firmly, and I do so with confidence.

1. First of all concerning the merits of the saints.

They say that the saints during this life have contributed many more good works than were required for salvation, that is, works of supererogation, which have not yet been rewarded, but have been deposited in the treasury of the church, by means of which, through indulgences, a

Second, no works of the saints are left unrewarded, for, according to everybody, God rewards a man more than he deserves. As St. Paul says, ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be’ [Rom. 8:18].

Third, no saint has adequately fulfilled God’s commandments in this life. Consequently the saints have done absolutely nothing which is superabundant. Therefore they have left nothing to be allocated through indulgences. I believe that the inference is clear enough. But I shall prove the major premise so that there is no doubt about it, but that it must be believed in such a way that the opposite view would be considered heretical.

I prove this argument first by that saying of Christ, ‘When you have done all that is commanded, say ‘We are unworthy servants’ [Luke 17:10]. But the term ‘unworthy servant’ is understood to refer to one who has done less and not more than he should, unless perhaps we should follow the dreams of certain absurd individuals who chatter that by his words Christ wanted this to be said for the sake of humility, not for the sake of truth, thereby making Christ a liar, so that they might appear truthful. I prove this argument secondly by that passage in Matt. 25[:9] which says that the wise maidens had no desire to share their oil for fear that there would not be enough also for themselves, Third, Paul says, I Cor. 3[:8], ‘Each shall receive his wages according to his labor.’ He does not say, ‘according to another’s labor.’ Fourth, I adduce Galatians 6, ‘Everyone must answer for himself’ [Cf. Gal. 6:4 -5], as well as the saying, ‘So that each one may receive... according as he has done in the body’ [II Cor. 5:10]. Fifth, every saint is obligated to love God as much as he can, indeed more than he can, but no one has or can do that. Sixth, the saints, in their most perfect work, that is, through death, martyrdom, and suffering, do no more than is required. Indeed they do what is required and scarcely that. Therefore they have done much less than they should in other works. Seventh, although I have produced so many reasons, they, on the other hand, to support their position, have not produced one, but only a recital of the circumstances, speaking without proof from the Scriptures, the teachers of the church, and sound reasons. For that reason we can, indeed we must, completely ignore their opinion. The following may serve as my proof.

Now I shall prove my argument with the authority of the holy fathers. I will do this first by quoting that well-known saying of St. Augustine: ‘All saints need to pray, ‘Forgive us our debts,’ even though they have done good deeds, for Christ made no exceptions when he taught us to pray.’⁸⁸ But surely those who confess their debts have stored up no superabundant merits. Second, according to Psalm 32[:2]. ‘Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity.’ And further on in the same psalm one reads, ‘Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to thee’ [Ps. 32:6]. St. Jerome, reflecting upon this in his *Dialogue Against the Pelagians*, says in excellent fashion, ‘How can he be a saint if he prays for his own ungodliness?’ He says again, ‘If he is ungodly, he is not a saint, etc.’⁸⁹ Therefore the saints, through prayer and the confession of their ungodliness, deserve to have no sin of theirs charged against them. Third, St. Augustine says in Book I of his *Retractations*, ‘All the commandments shall be fulfilled when that which is not fulfilled is forgiven.’⁹⁰ There he deals with the question whether or not the saints have completely fulfilled the commandments, and he denies that they have when he says that this takes place by God’s forgiveness rather than by man’s fulfillment. Fourth, the same writer says in the ninth book of his *Confessions*, ‘Woe to the life of men, however praiseworthy it may be, if it should be judged without compassion.’⁹¹ See how even the saints need compassion throughout their lives. To this Job adds, ‘Even though I am innocent, I shall appeal for mercy to my accuser’ [Job 9:15]. How, therefore, can these saints have superabundant merits for others, when they have not sufficient for themselves? Fifth, St. Augustine in his second book of *Against Julian*⁹² lists ten of the ancient church fathers who were of this same opinion, namely, Hilarius, Cyprian, Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Irenaeus, Olympius, Rheticius, and Innocent [I],⁹³ and he draws his support from their authority, proving that no saint is without sin in this life, according to that saying in I John 1[:8]: ‘If we say we have no sin, etc.’ St. Augustine says the same thing in his work *Concerning Nature and Grace*.⁹⁴

From these and from many other references which would take too long to enumerate, I conclude that the saints have no superabundant merits which would help those of us who are lazy. Speaking boldly, I declare that I have no doubt about those things I have just now said, rather I am prepared to endure death by fire for them, and I maintain that everyone who holds the contrary is a heretic.

Nevertheless, if I were to admit the impossible, that is, that the saints have actually stored up surplus merits, I am not sure whether the church would be doing such a worthy work when it expends such precious merits so cheaply, that is, for the remission of punishments. For the remission of punishment is the cheapest gift the church possesses and deserves

to be presented to the most worthless people, as I already said so often. However, the punishments of the martyrs and saints should be instead an example for us in bearing punishments. For we pray in this manner: “As we observe the feasts of the martyrs, let us imitate their courage in suffering.” Likewise, Mother Church does not appear to act piously when she remits punishments, but only when she chastises and coerces her children, as in the case of excommunications and other severe censures, which punishments she does not remit at all, but rather inflicts, especially when she has been most anxious about her children. But if she does remit the punishments, she does so as if out of despair, because she is afraid that something worse will happen. Therefore since remissions of punishments are such a cheap gift and the power of the keys alone is sufficient for that, it would certainly appear that not the slightest disrespect is done to such noble efforts of the saints if remissions were bestowed upon those who are snoring. St. Augustine said this much better in his sermon, *Concerning Martyrdom*, in these words: “The festivals of the martyrs are not remissions but exhortations to martyrdom, so that we should not hesitate to imitate that which we like to celebrate.”⁹⁵

Therefore this part of the thesis has been proved, that is, that the merits of the saints cannot act as a treasury for us since the saints themselves considered them deficient; unless someone should think that they are a treasure for us, not because they are surplus merits, but because the church is a communion of saints in which each one works for the other, as members one of another. But the saints did this during their lifetime, and if they were to do it now, it would be accomplished by intercession rather than by the power of the keys.

But at this point I hear at a distance the clever argument of certain individuals. “It is true,” they say, “that the saints were not without sin in this life, but they were only venial sins, and in spite of that the saints were able to do more than was required for salvation.” It is difficult to deal with such exceedingly stupid people in this matter. Nevertheless let me say it briefly: Their venial sin is that they do less than they should, not, however, that which my opponents alone imagine as a venial sin, namely, a laugh, a frivolous word, or a thought. This is, to be sure, a venial sin, but it is a big venial sin. But even a good work which has been done in the best manner is a venial sin, as cited above from the words of St. Augustine: “The commandments are fulfilled when what is not fulfilled is forgiven.”⁹⁶ And this happens in every good work, for according to the Lord’s Prayer we must always seek forgiveness. But these things require another disputation which will be dealt with elsewhere. Hence St. Bonaventura, who was a holy man, was absolutely wrong when he maintained that a man can exist without venial sin.

2. Concerning the second part of my argument, namely, the merit of Christ:

I argue that this is not the treasury of indulgences; but that it is the treasury of the church only a heretic would deny. For Christ is the Ransom and Redeemer of the world, and thereby most truly and solely the only treasury of the church. But that he is the treasury of indulgences I deny until I shall be taught differently. My reasons for denying this are these:

First, because, as I have often said, this cannot be proved by any Scripture passages, nor can it be demonstrated by reason. Furthermore, those who hold this opinion do not prove it but simply state it, as everybody knows. Moreover, I have said before that to make any assertion in the church without a reason or authority to support it is to expose the church to ridicule by its enemies and by heretics, since according to the Apostle Peter we are bound to give a reason for the faith and hope that is in us [I Pet. 3:15]. And Paul says that a bishop should be able by sound doctrine to confute those who contradict that doctrine [Titus 1:9]. But there is no such authority here, so that if today the Roman church should settle upon the affirmative side,⁹⁷ nevertheless the same danger remains because we can give no other reason except that it pleased the pope and the Roman church to do so. But what good would that reason be if we were pressed by those who do not believe in the Roman church, such as the heretics or the Picards? These people will not ask whether it is the will of the pope or the Roman church, but whether there is an authority or a plausible reason for it. And certainly that is my sole purpose in this whole matter.

Second, all the arguments which are adduced to prove the treasury of the church militant and the merits of the saints have more weight here. First, that indulgences are not really indulgences but rather transfers of the works of some to others, and constitute a true and legitimate satisfaction, since what we do, we do through another. But, as the canon says in book five of *Concerning Penance and Remission (Cum ex eo)*,⁹⁸ penitential satisfaction is weakened by indulgences. The canon does not say, “it is transferred,” but, “it is weakened.” My second argument also has more weight here, namely, that the keys of the church accomplish nothing and actually are rendered worthless since they do not loose but transfer to someone else that which is bound. But it is wicked to say that the keys do not loose. If they do loose they remove completely that which is loosed. My third argument is that the merits of Christ actually accomplish the same thing without the keys, for surely they will not lie idle! The fourth argument is that there would develop an extraordinary disrespect for the merits of Christ if they were to be used only for the remission of punishment, since he himself, by his own punishment, has become an example to all martyrs. Therefore it would be contrary to the nature of Christ’s merits that these merits should serve the sluggards while at the same time stimulating the zealous. As I have already pointed out, the remission of punishment is very cheap.

Third, let them give me an answer to the following contradiction: St. Thomas and St. Bonaventura and their followers say continually and unanimously that good works are better than indulgences, as I have said often enough previously. Granted that this is true. Likewise the merits of Christ are applied and administered through indulgences. Granted also that this is true, for all teachers continually maintain this opinion. Likewise, the merits of Christ are far better than our own good works, indeed they alone are good. Granted that this also is true because all of them assert this over and over again. Furthermore, the merits of Christ are incomparably better than our good works, indeed they alone are good. Very well, let this be true, too.

Here I conclude with this inference. Unhappy is he who does not put aside his good works and seek the works of Christ alone, that is, indulgences, since it would be the greatest blasphemy of all for one to prefer his own good works over the works of Christ. Therefore either the works of Christ are not the treasury of indulgences or else that person is a most arrogant and wretched individual who does not disregard all the commandments, even the divine commandments, and only purchases indulgences, that is, the merits of Christ. In opposing this view, St. Thomas and St. Bonaventura say indulgences are not commanded and are less important than good works. Therefore indulgences are not the works of Christ, yet at the same time and in a certain sense they are the works of Christ.

But perhaps, since my opponents are so ingenious, they will answer by Aristotelian distinctions in these words: "It is true that the themselves, are better than our works, but as such they are not indulgences, or rather they are not applied to indulgences in such a manner. They are received, however, just as they are in themselves, as satisfactions for punishments, and in this manner will they also be applied." I reply, Prove what you are saying. What if I do not care to believe your scant statement? I am commanded to "test the spirits to see whether they are of God" [I John 4:1].

Then, where does that put the statement which was made above, namely, that the merits of the saints are dispensed through indulgences not because they were rewarded, but because the saints had done some good works which they were not required to do? Are such merits, therefore, of so little value as to receive no other reward than that of satisfactions for others who are lazy? If so, I contend that the works of supererogation are the most noble and perfect of all. Do you agree? Yes. And do you mean that merits are not given as a reward to the martyrs and saints, but are granted to snoring sluggards? And is it true that the saints shall be rewarded according to their lesser works and merits while the more perfect works shall be left to others? I ask you, who is so insane as to believe that? Therefore St. Catherine⁹⁹ received nothing for her martyrdom and virginity, but left that for the church. Is her reward for prayer, vigils, and other good works sufficient? But if you should say that the saints were rewarded for their good works and at the same time left their superabundant merits to the church, what becomes of that statement which was made previously, that there are certain merits which have not yet been rewarded? Do you not see what it means to speak without authority and to prophesy in the dark?

But if it is wicked to say that the works of supererogation or those which the saints did over and above what they were required to do are of such little value and are not given to them as a reward, how much more wicked is it to make of such little value the works of Christ, all of which are in excess of what was necessary! Therefore to magnify indulgences in such a manner and at the same time to minimize those works of Christ by our own works is blasphemy against Christ and his saints in their merits, unless it is done by error and not intentionally.

Fourth, I take up again, the argument which the gloss to the work *Concerning Penance and Remission (Quod autem)*¹⁰⁰ raises, namely, "If indulgences are remissions of all punishments, then man no longer needs to fast or do good deeds." We must not conclude from this that remission is uncertain, but rather that the keys of the church are blasphemed, even though almost all the scholastic teachers support this opinion of Gregory. The quotation, "Man does not know whether or not he deserves [God's] love,"¹⁰¹ by which he proves his position, refers to a future event, for he who believes now does not know whether or not he will continue in faith. Hence in the same ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes it is immediately added that man does not know whether he deserves love or hate [Eccles. 9:2], but all things are kept uncertain up to the future, for he had said previously, "The righteous and their deeds are in the hand of God," etc. [Eccles. 9:1]. But if these passages make the remission of guilt uncertain, how much more uncertain do they make the punishments of guilt. For if guilt remains, punishment also must remain when the sin is completely erased through contrition, rather through faith in the keys. The gloss substantiates this interpretation of "remission."

What are indulgences then? An uncertain gift? Far be it, far be it that such a wicked illusion should stem from the church of Christ, indeed from the keys. Actually, then, as some say, indulgences would be a wicked deception of the faithful. Such an error arises when we seek to be justified through our own works and righteousness rather than through faith. At best the church teaches only about contritions. It teaches nothing about faith in the keys which should be taught most of all. But I spoke of these things at great length above. So either indulgences are not the treasury of the merits of the saints, or it must necessarily follow that one who has obtained indulgences must desist from doing good works for sins, as the gloss referred to maintains.

The explanation offered by this gloss is wickedness against Christ, for, if by indulgences the merits of Christ are granted to me and I am still in doubt whether my sins are remitted, then I must still work for the remission of those sins. It follows from this, that I doubt whether the merits of Christ which have been applied through indulgences and given to me are sufficient for the remission of sins. What could be more detestable than such a doubt? Moreover, if I do not doubt this but believe that they are sufficient, I should act in a most wicked manner if I should consider my own works better than indulgences, that is, the works of Christ which have been granted to me. For if I could obtain one, single work, just one-millionth part of the smallest work of Christ, I would be sure of eternal salvation. Therefore let us stop doing our own works for our sins and only purchase indulgences, for through indulgences we obtain not only one work but all the merits of Christ, and not only his but those of all the saints. Therefore, since the merits of Christ cannot be compared to ours in any way as far as excellence is concerned, either they are not the treasury of indulgences or else indulgences must be preferred to all the works of all commands of God; otherwise the greatest disrespect and blasphemy would be done to the merits of Christ. So watch how they add to this treasury the merits of the saints as well as the merits of the church militant, as if the merits of Christ alone were not enough.

But you ask, ‘Did not St. Thomas err also along with others? Does not the pope err along with the whole church, which is of the same opinion? Or are you the only one and the first one to have the right opinion?’

My first answer is, I am not the only one: the truth is on my side, as are many others, namely, those who have doubted and still doubt the validity of indulgences. They do not sin because of this doubt. Since remissions are only for punishments, a person will be saved whether or not he believes in them and whether he obtains them or not.

Second, the pope is on my side, for although he grants indulgences, nevertheless he nowhere says that they are taken from the treasury of the merits of Christ and the church. He explains his position in book five, *Concerning Penance and Remission*, in the chapter beginning with the words *Cum ex eo*,¹⁰² where he says that indulgences are an enervation of penitential satisfactions. But the enervation does not refer to the allotment of the merits of Christ, only to the removal of punishments.

Third, the whole church is on my side, for the church is of one mind with the pope and holds to the same opinion as the pope. I have already said what the pope says about it.

Fourth, even if St. Thomas, St. Bonaventura, and Alexander of Hales are distinguished men along with their disciples Antoninus, Peter of Palude, Augustine of Ancona,¹⁰³ besides the canonists who agree with them, nevertheless it is only right to give preference to the truth first, and then to the authority of the pope and the church. Furthermore, it is not surprising that such great men have erred in this respect. For, I ask you, in what great respects did not the scholastics contend that even St. Thomas had erred!

What is more, for more than 300 years now, many universities, and many of the sharpest minds in them, have labored with persistent industry to comprehend Aristotle alone. Yet they not only do not understand Aristotle after all this effort but even disseminate error and a false understanding of him throughout almost the whole church. And even if they should understand him, they would have attained no extraordinary wisdom thereby, particularly not from the Aristotelian books with which they are most familiar. According to his own testimony in the fourth chapter of book twenty by Aulus Gellius,¹⁰⁴ and according to the testimony of Gregory Nazianzen in his *Sermon Against the Arians*, Aristotle is discovered to be nothing more than a mere sophist and a handier of words.

Here I appear to be bold, brazen, and presumptuous. If I only had time and leisure to account for this boldness of mine and instill confidence in my words, perhaps I could show that this opinion of mine is not so unfounded. I would not harmonize Aristotle with Plato and others, which Giovanni Pico della Mirandola attempted, but paint Aristotle in his own colors as he deserves to be painted. He is by profession a master craftsman of words, according to Gregory Nazianzen, and a mocker of brilliant men. Therefore if God permitted such a great cloud and darkness to prevail for so long a time in such outstanding minds, how can we be so confident in our own works instead of looking upon all our efforts with suspicion, as Christians should, in order that Christ alone may become our light, righteousness, truth, wisdom, and our total possession.

The holy fathers of the church saw how the unlearned and those who did not know Christ held Aristotle in such esteem as an authority, and since they were of such meek disposition, they permitted themselves to be followed in godly innocence. Since they had fallen into error they became to others a cause for so many confusing opinions, doubts, and errors which we see reflected today in the scholastic teachers. We who have forsaken Christ have deserved to be abandoned by him and given over, even through his saints, to the risk of error and endless labor, as Ezekiel says, chapter 14[:9], ‘If the prophet be deceived and speak a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet.’ And in the same chapter we read: ‘If anyone comes to the prophet asking me through him, I, the Lord, will answer him myself because of the multitude of his idols’ [Cf. Ezek. 14:4]. Therefore everything must be read and accepted with fear and judgment even that which is handed down by great and holy men, according to the Apostle who says, ‘Test everything; hold fast what is good’ [I Thess. 5:21]. And John says, ‘Test the spirits to see whether they are of God’ [I John 4:1].

Those who have neglected such advice and entrusted themselves to men as those do, for example, who say, ‘I prefer to err with great men rather than be considered right with you,’ deserve to be despised and left to their own counsel. For why should not he who despises the counsel of the Spirit be rightfully despised by the spirit of the counsel? The same thing has happened in the matter of indulgences. When the holy teachers of the church saw how the people extolled so highly these indulgences (as the people always are accustomed to be as foolish in their judgment as Paris and Midas), and would not believe that they were so worthless, they even began to devise a respectable and extravagant basis for them since no other occurred to them-in fact there never was one.

Therefore let us return to the matter at hand and examine the merit of Christ and then show that it is not the treasury of indulgences.

My fifth argument is the basis for this statement: No one receives the grace of contrition without receiving at the same time the merits of Christ. Therefore a person possesses the treasury of the merits of Christ before he receives indulgences. If he did not possess these merits, indulgences would be of no value to him, according to the opinion of our teachers (for they think so highly of the remission of punishments). A man returns to the grace of God by means of contrition, just as in the parable of Christ the prodigal son returns to his father who says to him, ‘Everything I have is yours’ [Cf. Luke 15:11-32]. And Isa. 9[:6] says, ‘To us a child is born, to us a son is given.’ In Rom. 8[:32] we read, ‘Will he not also give us all things with him?’

Sixth, otherwise those who are the worst people in the church would be much happier. For I have said that indulgences are profitable only for criminals, and the treasury of the merits of Christ should be given to them! But it should not be given to children, young women, and the innocent, to whom it especially belongs, indeed, who alone possess it. But that argument counts for little for those who believe that all punishments are removed and that indulgences cannot be conferred upon sinners without contrition, which I do not believe.

Lastly, this thesis bears its own proof, that is, that the merits of Christ and his saints perform a two-fold work without the pope, to wit, a work characteristic of them, and a work alien to them. Works characteristic of them are grace, righteousness, truth, patience, and gentleness in the spirit of a man who has been predestined. For the righteousness of Christ and his merit justifies and remits sins, as John says, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ [John 1:29]. And Isaiah says, chapter 43[:24-25], ‘You have wearied me with your iniquities and burdened me with your sins. I, I am He who blots out your transgressions. . . , and I will not remember your sins.’ He blots them out by the merit of his suffering. In that sense I might concede that the merits of Christ are so to speak a treasury, not of the church, but of God the Father, for through his efficacious intercession before God Christ obtained for us remission of guilt. So it is stated in a figurative manner in Job: ‘I will show favor to him’ [Cf. Job 42:8]. And the Apostle says in Heb. 12[:24] that the blood of Christ cries out better than the blood of Abel, for the blood of Abel demands revenge and wrath, but the blood of Christ cries out for compassion and pleads for us. The merits of Christ perform an alien work, for that is what Isaiah calls it in chapter 28[:21], in that they effect the cross, labor, all kinds of punishment, finally death and hell in the flesh, to the end that the body of sin is destroyed [Rom. 6:6], our members which are upon earth are mortified [Col. 3:5], and sinners are turned into hell. For whoever is baptized in Christ and is renewed shall be prepared for punishments, crosses, and deaths, to the end that ‘he shall be accounted as a sheep for the slaughter and shall be slain all the day long’ [Ps. 44:22]. And as one reads in another psalm, ‘For I am ready to fall,’ whether it is appointed for me or not, ‘and my pain is ever with me’ [Ps. 38:17]. Just so must we be conformed to the image of the Son of God [Rom. 8:29], so that whoever does not take up his own cross and follow him, is not worthy of him [Matt. 10:38], even if he were filled with all kinds of indulgences.

From this you can now see how, ever since the scholastic theology – the deceiving theology (for that is the meaning of the word in Greek) – began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned up-side-down. A theologian of the cross (that is, ones who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics which the Lord of this theology himself has consecrated and blessed, not alone by the touch of his most holy flesh but also by the embrace of his exceedingly holy and divine will, and he has left these relics here to be kissed, sought after, and embraced. Indeed fortunate and blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of the relics of Christ should be given to him; rather, who understands that they are given to him. For to whom are they not offered? As St. James says, ‘Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials’ [Jas. 1:2]. For not all have this grace and glory to receive these treasures, but only the most elect of the children of God.

Many make pilgrimages to Rome and to other holy places to see the robe of Christ, the bones of the martyrs, and the places and remains of the saints, which we certainly do not condemn. But we lament the fact that we do not at the same time recognize the true relics, namely, the sufferings and crosses which have sanctified the bones and relics of the martyrs and made them worthy of such great veneration. And by not recognizing these true relics we not only do not receive them when they are offered at home, but even reject them with all our might and chase from place to place, while

with the greatest thirst and constant tears we should beg God that such precious relics of Christ, which are the most sacred of all, be given to us, as it were, a gift for the elect children of God. Thus Psalm 15 [Ps. 16] in the Hebrew bears the title *Miktam*, which might be interpreted, so to speak, as an excellent golden little present. Yet the psalmist sings only of the suffering of Christ. And the Psalm entitled “A Testimony of Asaph” [e.g., Ps. 80] learned ones prefer to interpret more as an amusement of Asaph, or as a delightful gift of Asaph, and yet there too a hymn of the cross is sounded.

Yet, so holy are these relics and so precious these treasures, that while others could be preserved on earth or most honorably in vessels of gold, silver, precious stones, and silk, these can only be preserved in heavenly, living, rational, immortal, pure, and holy vessels, that is, in the hearts of the faithful which are incomparably more precious than every piece of gold and every precious stone. But nowadays the common people lack the faith by which they might cultivate reverence for relics of this kind to the point where even some popes have become authors and leaders not only in condemning these relics, but even persecuting those who seek them. So much is this so that they wanted to devour the Turks and after this banish the Christians themselves to a condemnation worse than that of hell rather than remit one penny of their indulgence tax, to say nothing of upholding the wrong done to their name and body.

Yet in the meantime they have opened the floodgates of heaven and flooded the treasury of indulgences and the merits of Christ so that by this deluge almost the whole Christian world is ruined, unless my faith deceives me. A theologian of glory does not recognize, along with the Apostle, the crucified and hidden God alone [I Cor. 2:2]. He sees and speaks of God’s glorious manifestation among the heathen, how his invisible nature can be known from the things which are visible [Cf. Rom. 1:20] and how he is present and powerful in all things everywhere. This theologian of glory, however, learns from Aristotle that the object of the will is the good and the good is worthy to be loved, while the evil, on the other hand, is worthy of hate. He learns that God is the highest good and exceedingly lovable. Disagreeing with the theologian of the cross, he defines the treasury of Christ as the removing and remitting of punishments, things which are most evil and worthy of hate. In opposition to this the theologian of the cross defines the treasury of Christ as impositions and obligations of punishments, things which are best and most worthy of love. Yet the theologian of glory still receives money for his treasury, while the theologian of the cross, on the other hand, offers the merits of Christ freely. Yet people do not consider the theologian of the cross worthy of consideration, but finally even persecute him.

But who will be the judge of these two, in order that we may know which one to listen to? Behold, Isaiah says, chapter 66[:4], “I will choose what they ridicule.” And I Cor. 1[:27] states, “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, etc.” But if one should accept this judgment as true, there is nothing for us to do, if we wish to speak the truth, but confess that the treasures of indulgences are the greatest harm that can be done, if they are understood in such a manner as to be proclaimed universally as the remission of all punishments and not only those of the canons; for there is no harm that is greater than that of taking away from men the image of the Son of God and robbing them of those inestimable treasures, in which St. Agnes¹⁰⁵ took pride, with a joyful and blessed boasting, referring to them as beautiful, glittering stones and jewels, precious necklaces, etc.

59

St. Laurence 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.

This is clear enough to those who have read the legend of St. Laurence. But today the word “treasure” has a different meaning so that men no longer speak of the poor as the treasures of the church. With this word we refer to the patrimony of Christ and St. Peter, chaff without grain, as it were, which Constantine has given to the church.¹⁰⁶ Therefore in Ps. 2[:8], where God says, referring to Christ, “Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession,” one must understand it to mean cities and lands extending from the rising to the setting of the sun. If anyone today should speak in a different way about matters of the church and spiritual things, he would appear to us as one who speaks in a foreign tongue, even when St. Laurence, though not exclusively, referred to the possessions of the church as wealth.

60

Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church, given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure;

If the merit of Christ were also called the treasure of indulgences, that is to say, the power of the keys, the meaning would be clear. For no one doubts that everything which has been given to the church has been given by the merit of Christ.

61

For it is clear that the pope's power is of itself sufficient for the remission of penalties and cases reserved by himself.

1. This thesis is proved by that expression of the pope who in binding and loosing is never mindful of the merits of Christ, but says only that he does so “out of the fulness of his power, with sure knowledge, and on his own initiative.”¹⁰⁷

2. This thesis is proved, secondly, from the opinion common to all who hold that indulgences are granted on the strength of that word, where Christ says, “Whatsoever thou shalt loose, etc.” [Matt. 16:19]. This word, they feel, would have no force unless it gave the power of granting indulgences to the pope. They are, of the opinion that power alone is sufficient, but prove this treasury of indulgences without any authority, considering these words of Christ, as it were, sufficient. These words, however, speak only of power, not the application of merits.

3. If the above is true, then the distribution of the merits of Christ must be understood to apply to other occasions for binding and loosing as well; for example, when the pope in his priestly capacity excommunicates and absolves, ordains and unfrocks, issues decrees and annuls, commands and prohibits, grants dispensations, changes, or interprets. For all these matters are handled on the strength of that word, “Whatsoever” [Matt. 16:19]. Therefore if a distribution of the merits of Christ is not necessary in those cases, but the power of the keys alone is sufficient, how much more is that true for the remission of canonical punishments, since such a remission is nothing more than an absolution from punishments. Indeed, if a distribution of the merits of Christ is made anywhere, especially should it be made in the absolution of one who has been excommunicated. In that case the sinner is reconciled to the church and is declared once more a participant in the benefits of Christ and the church. Therefore there is no reason why the words “What soever thou shalt loose” [Matt. 16:19] should include the treasury of Christ for indulgences and not also for other relaxations, since the same authority, the same word, and the same meaning are applied in these cases.

4. If loosing through the power of the keys by granting indulgences brings about an unfolding and pouring forth of the treasury of the church, then, on the other side, binding through the power of the keys should bring about a gathering and shutting up of that same treasury. For they are opposite powers and opposite effects. But nowhere and never is it customary to gather or shut up this treasury, and yet, if there is a loosing and pouring forth then there must also be a shutting up, for both powers are given to the church and they are not given in vain or without purpose. Therefore, just as binding is understood as making one debtor without withholding from the treasury, that is, without actually taking anything away from him, so loosing must be understood as making one free, without actually spending from the treasury.

62

The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

The gospel of God is something which is not very well known to a large part of the church.. Therefore I must speak of it at greater length. Christ has left nothing to the world except the gospel. Also he has handed down to those who have been called to be his servants no such things as *minae*,¹⁰⁸ talents,¹⁰⁹ riches, and *denarii*,¹¹⁰ in order to show by these terms which speak of temporal treasures that the gospel is the true treasure. And Paul says that he himself lays up treasures for his children [II Cor. 12:14]. Christ speaks of the gospel as a treasure which is hidden in a field [Matt. 13:44]. And because it is hidden, it is at the same time also neglected.

Moreover, according to the Apostle in Rom. 1[:3-6], the gospel is a preaching of the incarnate Son of God, given to us without any merit on our part for salvation and peace. It is a word of salvation, a word of grace, a word of comfort, a word of joy, a voice of the bridegroom and the bride, a good word, a word of peace. Isaiah says, chapter 52[:7], “How beautiful.. are the feet of those who bring good tidings, who publish peace, who preach good tidings.” But the law is a word of destruction, a word of wrath, a word of sadness, a word of grief, a voice of the judge and the defendant, a word of restlessness, a word of curse. For according to the Apostle, “The law is the power of sin” [Cf. I Cor. 15:56], and “the law brings wrath” [Rom. 4:15]; it is a law of death [Rom. 7:5, 13]. Through the law we have nothing except an evil conscience, a restless heart, a troubled breast because of our sins, which the law points out but does not take away. And we ourselves cannot take it away. Therefore for those of us who are held captive, who are overwhelmed by sadness and in dire despair, the light of the gospel comes and says, “Fear not” [Isa. 35:4], “comfort, comfort my people” [Isa. 40:1], “encourage the fainthearted” [I Thess. 5:14], “behold your God” [Isa. 40:9], “behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29]. Behold that one who alone fulfills the law for you, whom God has made to be your righteousness, sanctification, wisdom, and redemption, for all those who believe in him [I Cor. 1:30]. When the sinful conscience hears this sweetest messenger, it comes to life again, shouts for joy while leaping about full of confidence, and no longer fears death, the types of punishments associated with death, or hell. Therefore those who are still afraid of punishments have not yet heard Christ or the voice of the gospel, but only the voice of Moses.

Therefore the true glory of God springs from this gospel. At the same time we are taught that the law is fulfilled not by our works but by the grace of God who pities us in Christ and that it shall be fulfilled not through works but through faith, not by anything we offer God, but by all we receive from Christ and partake of in him. ‘From his fulness have we all received’ [John 1:16], and we are partakers of his merits. I have spoken of this more extensively on other occasions.

63

But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last [Matt. 20:16].

The gospel destroys those things which exist, it confounds the strong, it confounds the wise and reduces them to nothingness, to weakness, to foolishness, because it teaches humility and across. Thus Ps. 9[:5] says, ‘Thou hast rebuked the nations, thou hast destroyed the wicked; thou has blotted out their name for ever and ever.’ Let all those whose pleasure is in earthly things and in their own doing shrink back before this rule of the cross, complaining, ‘This is a hard saying’ [John 6:60]. Therefore it is not surprising that this saying of Christ is most odious to those who desire to be something, who want to be wise and mighty in their own eyes and before men, and who consider themselves to be ‘the first.’

64

On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.

The treasure of indulgences teaches people to tremble before punishments, indeed makes them free from punishment which is due only to the righteous. For no one needs indulgences except one who is a slave of punishments, that is, one who does not look upon them with disdain and in proud contempt despises them, but is burdened by them and flees before them as a child flees from the shades of night and darkness. Yet they are permitted to go free while the righteous are subjected to various types of punishments.

65

Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.

The Apostle said, ‘I seek not what is yours but you’ [II Cor. 12:14]. And Christ said, ‘I will make you fishers of men’ [Matt. 4:19]. This sweet word directs as it attracts the will; indeed, it makes a man surrender his will to Christ. Hence St. Peter, portrayed as a fisherman in the city [of Rome], says, ‘For my ship I steer the Church, all the regions of the world are my sea, the Scripture is my net, man is the fish.’¹¹¹

66

The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.

I believe this is clear from what has been said, for man does not become better through the remissions of punishments, nor is he drawn to God more because of them. Only the word of Christ can do that. Remissions of punishments are words of a man who grants exemption and release rather than of one who ‘catches’ and binds. But if they ‘catch’ anything, surely it is nothing except money, for they do not catch souls.¹¹² It is not that I condemn this business of contributing money. However, since this drive for funds is least in value among the gifts and offices of the church, nor deserving enough to be crowned in the future life though it brings a modest monetary return in this life, God’s providence will see to it that nothing remains unrewarded. In former times releases were granted free of charge.

67

The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.

The brazen ignorance of the indulgence merchants dares to call that which is of least value the greatest; and judgment in these matters, as well as the ability to understand indulgences properly, is left to the people. As a consequence the people mistakenly believe that the grace of God is bestowed when they purchase indulgences. The merchants themselves do not explain indulgences in order that they may not be forced to contradict themselves or be discovered to be liars because they have called that which is the least value the greatest.

68

They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.

As a matter of fact, compared to the grace of God they are null and void since they work just the opposite of the grace of God. Nevertheless, put up with them for the sake of the sluggards and the indolent, as I have already indicated.

69

Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of papal indulgences with all reverence.

This is so because one must yield in reverence to the papal authority in everything. "He who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" [Rom. 13:2]. And the Lord himself said, "He who rejects you rejects me" [Luke 10:16]. Therefore one must yield to authority in small matters no less than in great ones. Thus it develops that even if the pope should hand down unfair judgments, they must be respected, as the Emperor Charles¹¹³ said, "Whatever has been imposed, however difficult it may be, must be carried out." And we have seen by experience that this has taken place in the church, which is surely hard pressed today with infinite burdens and yet bears them quietly in a godly and humble manner.

Nevertheless this statement must not be understood in such a way that a person develops a false conscience, that is, as if these unfair judgments should be respected because they must be acknowledged as fair by those who are required to respect them. The pope himself decreed that some should be bound by the church, who nevertheless are not bound in the sight of God, and he compels them to endure this binding. Yet such a binding does not harm them since it is only a punishment and should be respected. But it should not result in scruples of conscience. By the same token we must respect God in every other act of violence, in the secular realm as well, and not with contempt arrogantly resist it. In the same manner must we bear burdens, not because they were imposed fairly and must be accepted, but as a scourge that has been inflicted by God and which must be borne humbly. Therefore unfair decrees and burdens must be respected, not because of that word, "What soever thou shalt bind" [Matt. 16:19], but because of that general command, "Make friends with your adversary while you are on the way with him" [Matt. 5:25], and that passage, "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the left also" [Matt. 5:39], and in Rom. 12[:19], "Never avenge yourselves, etc." If this were only advice (since even many theologians appear to err), then by this same freedom it should be just as permissible to resist the pope when he inflicts his burdens and unfair decrees, as it is to resist the Turk or other adversaries. But one must not resist anyone, even if one does not approve his action, so that one does not act against one's conscience. But this matter, which is very essential, demands more time and another work.

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.

It is a well established rule of the jurists that the pope, in all the concessions which he makes, handles them in such a manner that he does injury to no other person unless he expressly mentions it and does so out of the fulness of his power, as the custom and manner of speaking of the Roman Curia shows. Therefore it is most certain that when a person bestows indulgences his desire is that they be considered nothing more than indulgences and that they have no value other than that which they have by their own nature. However, the pope does permit them to have as much value as they are worth and is satisfied to grant it. But nowhere does he declare what value they do have. This is the commission of the pope himself. But our preachers of indulgences go further and not only boast from their pulpits that they are popes, though others consider them more correctly "little poplar seeds,"¹¹⁴ but join to the name of pope also the office of pope as well as that of the church. Then they make us believe that they are, as it were, from heaven, and declare confidently what indulgences are, as a matter of fact, far more than they really are or ever could be, which they say can be proved from their very latest book.¹¹⁵ Therefore the bishops are obligated to prevent these fancies of theirs, lest they permit the wolves to enter the sheepfold of Christ, as it is expressly commanded in book five, *Concerning Penance and Remission (Cum ex eo)*,¹¹⁶ and as Clement commands in the same book, in the chapter entitled *Abusionibus*.¹¹⁷ So the bishops should permit these indulgence preachers to present nothing to the people except that which is contained in their letters of authorization.

71

Let him who speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed;

For although the bestowing of indulgences is a small matter compared to the grace of God and in contrast to the loud bellowing of those who preach them, nevertheless he who would raise his voice against it acts arrogantly against [papal] authority. Therefore he deserves to be cursed, since ecclesiastical obedience to the pope is so much more admirable when he gives up his own feeling in lesser things and humbles himself. But whatever may be the truth concerning indulgences enough has been discussed up to this point and still awaits the decision of the church. Whatever may be the final decision about them it is evident that indulgences are only relaxations of temporal punishments. The relaxation of punishments, however, as I have said, is the cheaper gift the church can give, especially if it is given to those whose guilt is remitted. But next to the holy gospel, the remission of guilt is the greatest gift of all, for which my opponents care very little and of which they know nothing.

72

But let him who guards against the lust and license of the indulgence preachers be blessed.

For such is today the condition of the widow of Christ,¹¹⁸ the holy church, that everything is permitted to everybody and especially to the scholastic theologians, among whom it is possible to find those who even condemn true opinions for no other reason than that they do not flow forth from their own spring. Yet they are permitted to maintain that God commits sin, that God is the cause of evil and of guilt, and many other things do they maintain. But if a poet or orator (as they are called) or a scholar of Greek, Latin, or Hebrew were to say this, he would be considered the most wicked of all heretics. But they do much more harm. If a Christian should supply weapons to the Turks or waylay pilgrims who journey to Rome, or should forge papal documents, it is such a great crime that authority has never been given to anyone to grant remission for an outrage of that kind even if the fullest authority of the highest plenary indulgence should be granted. But the papal chair reserves that for itself. So holy did the church at one time consider these things that when the commandments of God were first observed, the church wanted to punish even the smallest violations with the greatest severity. For there was not yet in the church that Lerna¹¹⁹ and that infernal abyss of simony,¹²⁰ lusts, pageantry, murders, and all the rest of the abominations.

But if these violations are punished so severely, then with what severity do we feel they should be punished who offer weapons, not to the Turks, but to demons, and supply them, not with any kind of weapons but our own, that is the Word of God, while they contaminate that Word with their fancies and, as Isaiah used to say, melt it down into an idol by their spirit [Cf. Isa. 40:19], so that it is no longer an instrument by which the soul is attracted to God but rather seduced into false opinions? Yet this offense is so generally permitted that one would be considered the most wicked of all men who would not consider it as a virtue and a merit above all merits, no matter who should do it. St. Jerome also complained that the Scripture is open to all, not for learning, but for tearing to pieces.¹²¹ Therefore if those who hinder people from going to Rome sin so greatly, what about those who prevent them from going to heaven, not only by their contemptible doctrines but also by their most corrupt practices? And where are they going who do not violate papal documents but the divine Scriptures? They ‘have taken away the key of knowledge; they do not enter themselves and they hinder those who are entering’ [Cf. Luke 11:52]. Are these abominations not considerably greater and worse than those which are read on Maundy Thursday and reserved for that day?¹²² But they deserve to be read only in heaven and shall never be remitted. Therefore they are worthy of blessing who strive to purify the Holy Scriptures and lead them out of the darkness of scholastic opinions and human reasoning into the proper light. In these words we have almost made ourselves Pelagians in doctrine and Donatists in our method. But more about this elsewhere.

73

Just as the pope justly thunders against those who by any means whatsoever contrive harm to the sale of indulgences.

I say again what I have said before (whatever may be the personal intention of the pope) that one must give in humbly to the authority of the keys, be kindly disposed to it and not struggle rashly against it. The keys are the power of God which, whether it is rightly or wrongly used; should be respected as any other work of God – even more so.

74

But much more does he intend to thunder against those who use indulgences as a pretext to contrive harm to holy love and truth.

However much this power of the keys must be honored, we must not be so dastardly as not to reprove its abuse or resist it. In the same way all the saints have supported and honored the secular power, which the Apostle also calls God's power [Rom. 13:1-7], even in the midst of punishments and tortures which that authority placed upon them; nevertheless they deprecated its abuse constantly. And the early Christians did not support this authority because the rulers had used the power rightly by persecuting them, but left them to the consciousness of an evil deed, and through their death bore the witness and confession of their innocence, as St. Peter says, "Let none of you suffer as a thief, etc." [I Pet. 4:15]. So if the church or the pope should deprive anyone of the communion of the faithful without cause, one must support that decision and not condemn authority, but one must not respect it to the point where he approves it as though it were a good deed, but rather he must die in the state of excommunication. For he has been excommunicated only through a misuse of the keys; and if he were to approve this error because of a desire to be absolved, his error would be even worse. He should honor and bear the power of the keys but he should not approve the error.

Those who preach indulgences in such a manner that they want them to appear as favors of God must be excommunicated, for their practice is contrary to truth and love, in which such grace alone consists. And it would be far better to have no indulgences than to propagate such notions among the people; for we can be Christians without indulgences but we would become nothing but heretics with such ideas. It is certain, however, that the pope either believes or should desire that there should be first of all mutual love and compassion among the people and that the other commands of God should blossom forth in that atmosphere, and so he grants indulgences. But he is deceived, for love, compassion, and faith are almost completely gone and have not merely cooled off among us. If he knew this he would have indulgences eliminated in order that the people might first of all return to mutual love. So I call upon the Lord Jesus as my witness that the people for the most part (some think completely) do not know that works of love are better than indulgences. On the contrary, they believe that they can do nothing better than purchase indulgences. And the people have no faithful teacher to correct this heretical and destructive opinion, but only indulgence-promoters strongly urging them on with their high-sounding fanfare.

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.

I am forced to call them foolish who hold such opinions, and we should beg pardon from the holy virgin because we are compelled to say and think such things, yet there is no way open to escape the necessity of saying them. I do not know what diabolical work has caused the people to spread this rumor about papal indulgences everywhere or whether it has really been said by the people or only understood as such by them. Indeed, even if it were maintained by many men and by men of distinction that it has been preached in many places, nevertheless I myself should be surprised at it rather than believe it and consider that they must have heard falsely. Therefore in this thesis I do not wish to censure anyone who harangues the people, but only to warn the people who have begun to hold as opinions what, perhaps, no one has actually said. Whether they themselves have said it or not does not concern me until I am more convinced. Nevertheless, wherever that most wretched opinion may have originated, it must be damned and condemned. Still it would not be surprising that such an opinion is held by the people, since they hear how great and terrible sins are considered to be of the slightest consequence in the interest of magnifying the favors bestowed by indulgences.

True and evangelical preaching is to magnify the sins as much as possible in order that man may develop fear of God and proper repentance. Finally, what is the benefit of sounding off with so many exaggerations, in the interests of that most worthless remission of punishments, in order to extol indulgences, while hardly mumbling in the interests of that most salutary wisdom of the cross? Indeed, why would this be harmful to the simple people who are used to evaluating the Word of God only in proportion to the gestures and pomp which are used in preaching it? While the gospel is

expounded with no enthusiasm at all, indulgences are expounded with the greatest of pomp. This is done that the people may expect nothing from the gospel and everything from indulgences.

When they dare to shout that murder, robbery, lust of every sort, blasphemies against the virgin Mary and God are insignificant things which may be remitted by these indulgences, is it still surprising that they do not also shout that those lesser things reserved in the bull, *In Coena Domini*,¹²³ are remitted? “The pope does not remit them.” Therefore watch carefully whether or not he remits, or at least remits with great difficulty, those things which are far more serious than these.

76

We say on the contrary that papal indulgences cannot remove the very least of venial sins as far as guilt is concerned.

I would not have made this understatement if it were not that I wanted to make the opinion expressed in the preceding thesis detestable. It is evident, however, that only God can remit guilt. Therefore those great sins are not remitted by authorities of the church but are only declared by them as remitted and the punishment for them is remitted. I say this according to their interpretation. My own opinion, however, has been made clear enough above. But here I should have said more about venial sin because it is valued so lightly today that it is hardly considered a sin at all. And I am afraid that many will come to great destruction who snore so securely in their sins and do not see that they have committed really big ones. I must confess that as long as I read the scholastic teachers I never really understood what or how great an offense a venial sin was. Whether or not they themselves understand it I do not know. I say this briefly, however: One who does not constantly fear and act as if he were filled with mortal sins, will hardly be saved at all, for the Scripture says, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord” [Ps. 143:2]. Not only venial sins, as they generally call them today, but even good works cannot endure the judgment of God, for both of them need the forgiving compassion of God. The Scripture does not say, “Enter not into judgment with your enemy,” but “with your son who serves you.” Therefore fear should teach us to groan for the compassion of God and to put our confidence in that. When that is lacking, we begin to place our confidence in our own conscience rather than in the mercy of God, until we are no longer conscious of any great sin which we might have committed. Such individuals will meet a horrible judgment.

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 in 1 Cor. 12[:28].

For all those in the church who possess these gifts come under the authority and obedience of the pope, and he can send them wherever he wants to, even if he himself personally should not possess these gifts. So I should not say that the bull, *In Coena Domini*,¹²⁴ with the cases reserved to it, has not yet been repealed. The pope would be more merciful if he would give all these authorized pardons freely to all Christians who need them, and if, by removing canonical burdens, he would restore freedom to Christian people and destroy the tyranny of those holding offices and guilty of simony. But perhaps he has no power to do these things, “for the enemy has prevailed” and “the princess among the cities has become a vassal” [Lam. 1:1]. “The right hand of the Lord does valiantly” [Ps. 118:16], if we should be worthy of obtaining such freedom.

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.

Who does not see how brazen these men are? What else would they not dare to do, who dare to do such things? Must the souls who are redeemed by the blood of Christ be entrusted to these men? The cross of Christ gives life to the whole world by the destruction of sin. That cross, on the other hand, which is equipped with the papal coat of arms, grants the remission of certain punishments. Are therefore eternal and temporal punishments to be considered of equal value? But why should I pursue all the monstrosities which follow from such preaching, the spreading abroad of which not even heaven itself can endure?

The bishops, curates, and theologians who permit such talk to be spread among the people will have to answer for this.

One is afraid of the power of the church and therefore afraid that errors and offenses committed today against the Roman chair will be punished by a two-edged sword. But why must one be thus silenced? ‘Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul’ [Matt. 10:28]. ‘Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father’ [Matt. 10:32]. Therefore I am anxious to know who first invented the explanation¹²⁵ that the two swords mean, on the one hand, the spiritual – not spiritual however in the sense that the Apostle speaks of it, namely ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’ [Eph. 6:17] – and, on the other hand, the temporal. This interpretation is used in order to make the pope appear as a man who is armed with a twofold power, not as a loving father to us but, as it were, a great tyrant, in whom we see nothing but power.

And that is the truest explanation of the decrees of the fathers which so strongly forbid the bearing of arms to clerics.¹²⁶ One can see now that an angry God, observing that we choose to interpret this sword as one of iron rather than one of the Spirit and the gospel, treats us most justly when he grants the sword which we desire and takes away that which we do not desire. Because of this there never have been in the world more cruel devastations of war than those among Christians, and the holy Scriptures have hardly been more neglected than among Christians. Lo, you have the sword which you have desired. Indeed, this explanation is one which is worthy of hell. Yet we are stones and do not recognize the wrath of God. Why, I ask, does not that shrewd mind which is so worthy of love use its cleverness also to interpret the two keys in the same manner: one supplying the riches of the world and the other the riches of heaven? Indeed, the meaning of the second key is clear enough, for, as the indulgence demagogues say, this key continually opens heaven and lets the riches of Christ flow down. But one cannot see so clearly the meaning of the first key, for he knows how greedy the spendthrift is who controls the wealth of the church. For it is not profitable for the church and the patrimony of Christ that the riches of the world be dissipated with as great a liberality as the riches of heaven. Therefore the first key is the key of knowledge; and if there should be added to it, ‘The first sword is the sword of knowledge,’ one would speak apostolically. ‘For all this his [God’s] anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still’ [Isa. 9:21]. His hand is extended because it is a surprisingly difficult matter to enter into the thought of the Holy Scriptures, in which Scriptures we have been instructed, according to the Apostle, ‘to destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God’ [II Cor. 10:5].

A shorter way out of this difficulty appeals to us and that is not by getting rid of the heresies and errors but by burning the heretics and those who are in error. In this respect we are led by the advice of Cato rather than by that of Scipio over the question of the destruction of Carthage.¹²⁷ By so doing we act contrary to the will of the Spirit, who writes that the Jebusites and Canaanites should remain in the land of promise in order that the children of Israel might learn to fight and develop the habit of fighting [Judg. 3:1-6]. But if St. Jerome does not deceive me, I think that this passage of Scripture speaks figuratively about wars with heretics.¹²⁸

Surely, however, the Apostle is worthy of trust when he says, ‘There must be heresies’ [I Cor. 11:19]. But we answer, Not at all; the heretics must be burned and thus the root must be torn out with the fruit, indeed the tares along with the wheat [Cf. Matt. 13:28-29]. What do we say to this? We can only say to the Lord with tears, ‘Righteous art thou, O Lord, and right are thy judgments’ [Ps. 119:137]. For what else do we deserve? Therefore I mention these things, in order that the Picards,¹²⁹ our neighbors, heretics, an unhappy people who rejoice in the stench of Rome as the Pharisee rejoiced over the publican [Luke 18:11] instead of showing mercy to him – I say, I mention these things in order that the Picards might not believe that we do not know our vices and imperfections and in order that they might not pride themselves unduly over our wretchedness if we should appear to keep silence about these matters and approve them.

We know our condition and we grieve over it, but we do not flee like the heretics and pass by the one who is half dead [Luke 10:30] as though we were afraid of being stained by the sins of others. Because of this foolish fear these heretics are so afraid that they are not ashamed to boast that they flee¹³⁰ in order that they themselves may not be polluted. So great is their love. But, however wretchedly the church operates, we stand by it ever so faithfully and hasten to its aid with, tears, prayers, admonitions, and supplications. For love commands us thus ‘to bear one another’s burdens’ [Gal. 6:2], not as the love of heretics does, which seeks only to take advantage of another in order that it may be supported and endure nothing harmful from the sins of others. But if Christ and his saints had wanted to do that, who would have been saved?

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,

Even if my friends have been calling me a heretic, an irreverent person, and a blasphemer for a long time because I do not interpret the church of Christ and the Holy Scriptures in a Catholic sense, nevertheless, relying upon my conscience, I believe that they deceive themselves, but that I cherish the church of Christ and its honor. However, ‘It is the Lord who judges me although I am not aware of anything against myself’ [Cf. I Cor. 4:4]. Therefore I am forced to maintain all these propositions because I saw that some were infected by false ideas, others made fun of them in the taverns and openly ridiculed the holy priesthood of the church. And all this resulted from the overburdening shamelessness of the indulgence preachers. One should not have stirred up the lay people, by any further occasion, to a hatred of the priesthood, because, even though we have embittered them with our greed and most shameful behavior for many years, they still respect the priesthood (alas, only out of fear of punishment).

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 reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial.’

It is not the pope but the treasurers of the Holy See who provoke this question, for, as I have said previously, nowhere can there be found any decree of the popes concerning this matter. Therefore those who have provoked this question should answer it. I myself would answer all these questions with one word, as far as it can be done to the honor of the pope, namely, that no one informs people of the truth of the matter, and it frequently happens that when they are informed wrongly they yield to wrong ideas.

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?’

I know that many others like myself have wearied themselves over that question, and although we have considered this question many times, we have troubled ourselves in vain trying to find an answer. We have also said that if souls should fly from purgatory to heaven, then the masses said on their behalf should contribute to the praise of God, which happens when children and infants die. Each one tried to give a different answer to this question, but no one did it satisfactorily. Finally I began to discuss it and to deny that their statements were true in order that I might in this way draw out from those who are more learned than I¹³¹ what answer ought to be given to laymen.

84

Again, ‘What is this new piety of God and the pope that for a consideration of money they permit a man who is im pious 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?’

To this and similar questions I say, it is not for us to judge the will of the pope, but only to endure it, even if it should upon occasion be evil, as I have said previously. Nevertheless, he and the preachers of indulgences must be warned that the people should not be given such an open occasion to say, as the priest Eli once did, that because of his sons ‘the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt’ [I Sam. 2:17]. Yet if it was ever the intention of the pope to build the Basilica of St. Peter with all the money scraped together from poor people, rather than the intention of those who abuse his willingness for their own gain, it is not necessary to put down in writing what the people say indiscriminately about that building. God grant that I lie in this matter, for this extortion of money can not go on very long.

87

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

This question has arisen because many people, even the jurists, say that they do not know what remission of guilt by the keys is, about which I have given my opinion previously.

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?’

At this point one hears the most surprising things. Some imagine a common treasury which is increased by indulgences. Therefore if a man obtains plenary remission seven times a day, which can happen in Rome, so many more benefits will he receive. These men contradict themselves, for, according to them indulgences are expenditures of the treasury and not receipts. Others, moreover, think that sins are remitted forever by a continuous division, as wood is divided into even more divisible parts. Thus sins are remitted and are always still further remissable, although they become smaller and smaller. I confess that I don't know what I should say about this.

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?’

This disturbs and displeases me most of all and, I confess, to a great degree, for this suspending of earlier letters and indulgences is the only reason that indulgences have become worthless. I cannot deny that everything which the pope does must be endured, but it grieves me that I cannot prove that what he does is best. Although, if I were to discuss the intention of the pope without becoming involved with his mercenary hirelings, I would say, briefly and with confidence, that one must assume the best about him. The church needs a reformation which is not the work of one man, namely, the pope, or of many men, namely the cardinals, both of which the most recent council¹³² has demonstrated, but it is the work of the whole world, indeed it is the work of God alone. However, only God who has created time knows the time for this reformation. In the meantime we cannot deny such manifest wrongs. The power of the keys is abused and enslaved to greed and ambition. The raging abyss has received added impetus. We cannot stop it. ‘Our iniquities testify against us’ [Jer. 14:7], and each man's own word is a burden to him [Cf. Gal. 6:5].

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.

For while the people are being held in check by fear, a worse evil develops. How much more appropriate it would be if we were taught to understand the wrath of God, to pray for the church, and to endure such trials in the hope of a future reformation, than if we were to stir up an even worse evil by desiring to compel people to look upon such manifest evils as virtues. If we did not deserve to be tormented God would not permit men alone to dominate his church. Rather, he would give us shepherds after his own heart [Jer. 3:15], who would give us, instead of indulgences, a measure of wheat in due time [Luke 12:42]. Moreover, even if there still are good shepherds, they cannot administer their office properly; so great is the anger of God's fury.

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.

How so? Namely, if indulgences are only remissions of punishments, which they are, not meritorious and looked upon as inferior to good works, there would not have been any agitation at all to doubt them. Now, because they have been valued too highly, they stir up, to their own disparagement, questions that are unanswerable. For the intention of the pope cannot be anything else than that indulgences are only indulgences.

92

Away then with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, ‘Peace, peace,’ and there is no peace! [Jer. 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].

Enough has been said previously about cross and punishments. Rarely do you hear a sermon about it today.

TO THE SINCERE AND LEARNED READER

Do not assume that these things were published for you, my learned and brilliant reader (but why is this reminder necessary?), as though I were afraid these matters might appear Ciceronian to you. You have other things which you may read according to your own inclination. It was necessary for me to discuss with my equals those things which we have in common, that is, crude and barbarian matters. So it has pleased heaven. And I would not have dared to call upon the name of the pope for these notions of mine if I had not seen how greatly my friends relied upon the pope's power to frighten me and also because it is the official duty of the pope to make himself "a debtor to the wise and to the foolish, to Greeks and to barbarians" [Rom. 1:14]. Farewell.

A.D. 1518

¹ Johann Tetzel.

² Conrad Wimpina.

³ Peter Lombard. Migne 192, 519-984. In the fourth book, Lombard discusses eschatological subjects and the sacraments.

⁴ Luther here evidently has in mind Aesop's familiar fable, *The Ass in the Lion Skin*.

⁵ *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX* Lib. v. tit. XXXVII, cap. 4. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II, col. 885.

⁶ Cf. Thesis 5.

⁷ That is, scholastic argumentation.

⁸ Peter Lombard, op. cit.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Book 4.

¹⁰ Cf. p. 282, n. 8.

¹¹ Since there were a number of scholastic theologians by this name, we do not know to whom Luther refers.

¹² Cf. p. 262, n. 8.

¹³ According to Roman doctrine a martyr does not go to purgatory but immediately enters heaven. For this reason he is prayed to immediately, but one does not pray for him.

¹⁴ This letter of Cyprian was addressed to the presbyters and deacons informing them of the action they should take in re-admitting the lapsed into the church.

¹⁵ *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX* Lib. v. tit. XXXIV, cap. 28. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II, cols. 899-900.

¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (Oxford and New York, 1890) I, 81-400. A more recent translation is that by Kirsopp Lake in the Loeb Classical Library (2 vols.; London and New York, 1928-1932).

¹⁷ *Historia ecclesiastica vocata tripartita*. Migne 9, 879-1214.

¹⁸ Dionysius the Areopagite, referred to in Acts 17:34, probably was not the author of this work.

¹⁹ The term "Picard" is derived from the name "Beghard" which refers to a variety of mystical religious movements in Flanders and the Rhineland during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Luther probably refers to the spiritual descendants of the Picardi in Bohemia, whom the moderate Hussites considered heretics.

²⁰ Migne 32, 778-780.

²¹ John Tauler was born at Strassburg about 1300 and died June 18, 1381. Cf. p. 73.

²² Cf. *Officium et Missae pro Defunctis. Offertorium 2*. In *Liber usualis Missae et Officii* (Paris, Tornaci, Rome, 1929) p. 1886.

²³ *Ibid.* A versicle: *Ad Vesperas and Laudes*, p. 1149, et al.

²⁴ The Latin word in the Weimar edition is *servire* (to serve). Here I have read it *saevire* (to rage), with EA 2,182, and CL 1,58.

²⁵ *Decretum Magistri Gratiani, Prima Pars*, dist. XXV, cap. 4. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, I, col. 94. Migne 187,148.

²⁶ *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, cap. 12. Migne 44,977; CL 1, 64, note.

²⁷ The "Vita Vincentii Ferrerii," *Acta Sanctorum*, April, I (Parts and Rome, 1866-), 476-510.

²⁸ Cf. the "glossa ordinaria" of Walafrid Strabo (d. 849) on Mark 1:34. In this instance a "gloss" is a marginal note employed for explanation of biblical passages.

²⁹ Innocent IV, *Apparatus in quinque libros decretalium*, ad. C.V. tit. 38, cap. 14, as cited in MA³ 1, 496.

³⁰ Antoninus (1389-1459) was archbishop of Florence and a Dominican scholar whose *Summary of Moral Theology* Luther has in mind; Peter de Palude (1275?-1342) was a teacher at Paris and a well-versed theologian to whose commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* Luther refers; Augustine of Ancona (d. 1328) was an Augustinian Eremitic whose *Summary of the Power of the Church* Luther knew; John Capreolus (d. 1444) was a Dominican who was considered the most able student of Thomas Aquinas in the fifteenth century. Francisco de Mayronis (1280?-1327) is considered one of the most distinguished disciples of Duns Scotus. Angelus

de Clavasio (d. 1495) whose *Summary of Questions of Conscience* (*Summa casuum conscientiae*) went through thirty editions between 1478 and 1520, was superficial in his treatment of matters relating to indulgences, and his book became the object of Luther's scorn.

³¹ St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a Dominican, was the greatest of the scholastic theologians. St. Bonaventura (1221-1274), a general of the Franciscans, was a respected scholastic theologian contemporary with St. Thomas.

³² Nicholas of Tudesco, archbishop of Palermo (Panormitanus) was a learned Benedictine scholar. Luther refers to his gloss in *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX* v. tit. XXXVIII, cap. 4. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II, col. 885.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Gottfried of Trani was a thirteenth-century canonist at the Roman Curia. Henry of Segusio also served in the Curia and became cardinal and archbishop of Ostia (thus called Hostiensis). Johannes Andreae was a canonist who taught at the universities of Bologna and Padua.

³⁵ Angelus de Clavasio.

³⁶ *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX* Lib v. tit. XXXVIII, cap. 14. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II, cols. 888-889.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Hilary of Arles (401?-450?) was an ascetic bishop who became involved in a dispute with Pope Leo I about luxurious living.

⁴⁰ Spiridon was an archbishop of Tramatous on Cyprus in the fourth century. He defended the Apostolic faith against the Arians at the Council of Nicaea (325).

⁴¹ The Latin *cubile* usually means couch or bed, *grabatum* a low couch, and *lectum* a couch of leaves. Virgil in *Aeneid* iii, 324 speaks of *cubile* as a marriage bed.

⁴² This reference is evidently to the scandalous Council of Pisa which was called in 1511 by a few French and Spanish cardinals to condemn Pope Julius II; but the cardinals refused. Luther here seems to refer to the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) dominated by Julius II and Leo X.

⁴³ The reference here is to Mezentius, king of Caere in Etruria, whose aid was invoked by Turnus against the invading Aeneas. According to the earlier story, told in Cato's *Origines*, Turnus and Aeneas alike fell in the subsequent conflict, and Mezentius was later killed or forced to submit in single combat with Acanius. Virgil in *Aeneid* (vii-x) develops Mezentius into a full-blooded, atheistic tyrant, killed by Aeneas after the death, in his defense, of his attractive son Lausus.

⁴⁴ The days in the week following Michaelmas Day (Sept. 29).

⁴⁵ Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) and Lorenzo Valla (1405-1457), Italian humanists; Peter of Ravenna (1448-1518), an Italian jurist who late in life taught at Greifswald and Wittenberg; John Ruchrath of Oberwesel, or Wesel (1410?-1481), an Erfurt theologian and preacher, in Mainz and Worms; Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522), noted German lawyer, statesman, and humanist; and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (Faber Stapulensis, 1455-1536), a French humanist. All these were at one time or another tried or threatened by the Inquisition.

⁴⁶ A German proverb having its origin in law court procedure according to which the testimony of seven persons in favor of the witness could be superseded through the testimony of seven other persons. Cf. Wander, *Sprichwörterlexikon*, III, 255. MA³ 1, 502.

⁴⁷ Latin is *stationibus*. The reference is to the seven titular churches of Rome.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Refers to the best known book of Hostiensis (Henry of Segusio; d. 1271), entitled *Summa super titulis Decretalium*, also known as the *Summa aurea*, or *Golden Summary*. The author was an Italian canonist who taught at Bologna and Paris and later was made chaplain to the pope. See above, p. 149, n. 34.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Aeneid* vi, 1. 12.

⁵¹ *City of God*. Migne 41, 149ff.

⁵² *Exposition of Psalm 145*. Migne 37, 1897.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*

⁵⁴ *Clementis Papae V, Constitutiones* v. tit. IX, cap. 2. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II, cols. 1190-1191.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*

⁵⁶ *Clementis Papae V, Constitutiones* v. tit. IX, cap. 2. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, served as head of the school of his order in Paris. Cf. *CL* 1, 88, footnote to line 37.

⁵⁷ Julius II (pope: 1503-1513), the "warrior pope," joined the League of Cam brai against Venice and was attacked for this by many of his contemporaries.

⁵⁸ In his explanation of the bull of indulgence, *Romans pontificis*, issued 1477 by Sixtus IV (pope: 1471-1484) for the church at Saintes, the commissary for indulgences, Raimund Peraudi, states: "The way of intercession does not detract from the way of authority." Cf. MA³ 1, 503 and *CL* 1, 88, footnote to line 24. Cf. also *Proceedings at Augsburg*, p. 282.

⁵⁹ WA 1, 584, footnote 37, indicates that all editions read "Quinto" and suggests that the fourth point of the original manuscript may have been left unprinted by mistake.

⁶⁰ *Enchiridion ad Laurentium*, cap. 110. Migne 40, 283.

⁶¹ This is one of Luther's most important arguments against indulgences. He was not vehemently opposed to indulgences *per se*, but to the church and teachers who permitted the ignorant masses to believe that the purchase of indulgences made them sure of salvation and free from guilt before God, instead of free from punishments imposed by the church.

⁶² *CL* 1, 96 omits this question from the text.

⁶³ Reference here is to the *Summary Instruction* of Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, the general commissioner of the indulgence of Leo X, written for the sub-commissioners. Walther Köhler, *Dokumente zum Ablassstreit* (Tübingen, 1934), pp. 104-124.

⁶⁴ Cf. p. 125, n. 19.

⁶⁵ Cf. Migne 38, 793, sermon CXLV, where St. Augustine points out that love is greater than the eyes, hands, feet, stomach, and any other member of the body.

⁶⁶ Pseudolus, meaning liar, is also the title of a comedy by Plautus (254-184 B.C.).

⁶⁷ Mercury was a Roman god of commerce.

⁶⁸ This paragraph gives an excellent idea of Luther's conception of the atonement and justification by faith.

⁶⁹ Cf. Tract 80, 3, concerning the Gospel according to St. John, in Migne 35, 1840: "From whence does water have such great power that it cleanses the body and purifies the heart except from the word, not because it is spoken but because it is believed?" Cf. also Augsburg Confession, Article XIII.

⁷⁰ E.g. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* iii. ques. 61, art. 1.

⁷¹ Cf. p. 262, n. 8.

⁷² Cf. Migne 22, 891, epist. 108, cited in *CL* 1, 108. Paula was a wealthy friend of St. Jerome who lived near him in Bethlehem from 388 A.D. on.

⁷³ St. James of Compostella in Spain.

⁷⁴ Both became martyrs during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Decius in Sicily ca. A.D. 250.

⁷⁵ In the Middle Ages simony became a technical term referring to the practice of securing ecclesiastical office or preferment with money. The term is derived from Simon, the Magician, who offered the apostles money for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:9-24). Gregory VII (pope: 1073-1085) defined as simony acceptance of a clerical appointment from the hands of a layman.

⁷⁶ Febris was a goddess to whom three temples were erected in Rome. Remedies which had been helpful in cases of fever were placed in these temples.

⁷⁷ Luther's free rendering of Bonaventura's comment on Peter Lombard's *Sententiarum* iv. dist. XX, cap. 2, ques. 6. Cited in *CL* 1, 111.

⁷⁸ Theses 46 and 47 are given in inverse order in the *Explanations* from that in the *Ninety-five Theses* of 1517.

⁷⁹ Cf. Thesis 20.

⁸⁰ St. Bernard was a great preacher during the crusades of the twelfth century. He heartily approved the election of Eugenius III as pope in 1145. *Consideration* was St. Bernard's last work, written about 1148 at the pope's request and for his edification and guidance.

⁸¹ That is, days for buying and selling divine privileges. Cf. also p. 201, n. 75.

⁸² Caesar Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), quoted by Suetonius in his *Life of Tiberius* (*Vita Tiberii*), chap. 82.

- ⁸³ Cf. *De officiis ministrorum* ii. 28. Migne 18, 148-150.
- ⁸⁴ St. Paulinus (354?-431) was a personal acquaintance of St. Ambrose (340-395), bishop of Milan. After the death of his only child, who died in infancy, he and his wife Therasia entered monastic life. He became bishop of Nola about 409 and held that office until his death in 431. His feast day is June 22.
- ⁸⁵ When Paulinus made the decision for the ascetic life he turned over his enormous wealth to the church.
- ⁸⁶ Luther refers to the division of the mass into the *missa catechumenorum* and *missa fidelium* which evolved in the course of the second and third centuries of the Christian era. "Catechumens" is the name given those who were being instructed in preparation for baptism, not, as is the custom in many churches today, for confirmation.
- ⁸⁷ Cf. p. 208, n. 81.
- ⁸⁸ *Concerning Nature and Grace*. Migne 40, 266ff.
- ⁸⁹ Migne 23, 538: "If he is a saint how can he pray for his ungodliness? If he has ungodliness, why is he called a saint?"
- ⁹⁰ Migne 32, 615.
- ⁹¹ Migne 32, 659-868; cf. 778.
- ⁹² Migne 44, 671-874. Emperor Julian (361-363) turned against Christianity and tried to revive paganism.
- ⁹³ Actually only 9 are listed here.
- ⁹⁴ Written A.D. 415 against the Pelagians. Cf. p. 9 n. 1, and p. 214 n. 88.
- ⁹⁵ *Sermo* 123, chap. 2. Migne 38, 684-685.
- ⁹⁶ Cf. p. 214, n. 90.
- ⁹⁷ That is, the opinion that the merits of Christ become a part of the treasury of indulgences.
- ⁹⁸ *Op. cit.*
- ⁹⁹ St. Catherine, one of the most honored saints of the Eastern and Western churches, whose name is linked with many legendary accretions on account of the martyrdom she presumably met at the hands of Maximinus or Maxentius during the Diocletian persecutions (284-305).
- ¹⁰⁰ *Op. cit.*
- ¹⁰¹ MA³ attributes this quotation to Nicholas of Tudesco (Panormitanus). Cf., however, Eccles. 9:1.
- ¹⁰² *Op. cit.* Cf. also Thesis 20.
- ¹⁰³ For identification, cf. Thesis, 20, p. 148, n. 30.
- ¹⁰⁴ Aulus Gellius, a grammarian of the second century A.D., in his *Noctes Atticae* prepared a digest of conversations with contemporaries concerning writings of great literary men, including Aristotle. Aristotle's testimony concerning himself is not to be found in the source to which Luther refers. Cf. MA³ 1, 511 and CL 1, 128. The *Sermon Against the Arians* is in Migne, *Patrologiae, Series Graeca*, 38, cols. 213-238.
- ¹⁰⁵ Held in high esteem as representing youthful chastity and innocence in Roman and Eastern Orthodox Churches, St. Agnes was put to death *circa* 304.
- ¹⁰⁶ The patrimony of Christ and St. Peter refers to the Papal States as hereditary territories initially acquired by the pope through Constantine's Edict of Milan in 321 and greatly expanded thereafter. In the late Middle Ages the *Donation of Constantine*, a spurious document having its origin in the eighth century, was employed to defend the legal rights of the pope as a temporal sovereign. Upon its incorporation into canon law certain interpolations were made into the *Donation* by Paucapalea referred to as *palea* (chaff). Hence Luther's play on words in the phrase, "chaff without grain."
- ¹⁰⁷ Luther employs these phrases which were frequently used in papal decrees.
- ¹⁰⁸ Greek sum of money, equivalent in weight to a hundred Attic drachmas.
- ¹⁰⁹ Probably the Attic talent that contains 60 *minae*.
- ¹¹⁰ A Roman silver coin.
- ¹¹¹ According to CL 1, 133, this may be a reference to Luther's visit to Rome in the winter of 1510-1511.
- ¹¹² Cf. Luke 5:10: "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men."
- ¹¹³ I.e., Charles the Great, or Charlemagne.
- ¹¹⁴ A play on the words *papae* (popes) and *pappi* (little seeds floating through the air like flakes).
- ¹¹⁵ The *Summary Instruction* of the archbishop of Mainz.
- ¹¹⁶ *Op. cit.*
- ¹¹⁷ *Op. cit.*
- ¹¹⁸ Rev. 21:2 and 9 describe the church as the bride of Christ. With this metaphor as background in his thinking Luther describes the church when separated from Christ as a widow.
- ¹¹⁹ Reference is to that polycephalous monster that lived in a forest and marsh near Argos, called Lerna. This forest and the stream of the same name which flowed through it was the haunt of the Lernaean Hydra, which Hercules slew with the help of Iolaus. He then drained the marsh.
- ¹²⁰ Cf. p. 208, n. 81.
- ¹²¹ Migne 22 544, epist. LIII: "Only the art of interpreting the Scriptures is claimed by all and sundry: the talkative old woman and the feeble old man, the verbose sophist. In short, all presume to do this. They teach before they learn and so tear the Scriptures to pieces."
- ¹²² The bull, *In Coena Domini* issued by Urban V in 1363, was read in each year on Maundy Thursday, the day of the institution of the Lord's Supper. Among other matters the bull anathematized all those who by robbery prevented the movement of victuals to Rome by land and sea and those who might attempt by robbery to prevent aluminum being transported to Rome from the papal mines at Tolfa. Cf. MA³ 1, 514.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁵ Peter Damiani (1007-1072).
- ¹²⁶ *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX* iii. tit. I, cap. 2. *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II, col. 449.
- ¹²⁷ Cato advocated the annihilation of Carthage, Scipio Africanus favored its continued existence once its hostile government had been eliminated.
- ¹²⁸ Migne 22, 548, epist. LII: "As many princes of the people are named in the book of Job as there are parables."
- ¹²⁹ Cf. p. 125, n. 19.
- ¹³⁰ CL 1, 143 reads *surgere* (to arise) instead of *fugere* (to flee).
- ¹³¹ CL 1, 144 reads *doctoribus*. The editors have followed the reading of WA 1, 626: *doctoribus*.
- ¹³² The Fifth Lateran Council whose twelve sessions were held at Rome at various intervals from 1512-1517.