

# Drawing Aside the Purple Curtain

*The Papal System Today: an Analysis of the News*

## Limited Time Offer on Indulgences: Hurry Now Before “Treasury of Merits” Slams Shut Again

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by Shaun Willcock

Although it's an ever-diminishing number these days, there are Protestants who still know that a mysterious thing called *indulgences* had something to do with the start of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. But of those who do know this, many of them are under the impression that indulgences are a relic of earlier, less enlightened times, and that they are hardly ever, if ever, mentioned within Roman Catholic circles nowadays.

How wrong they are, as the Roman pope, Benedict XVI, showed to all the world in 2012...

### *The Roman Pope Grants a “Plenary Indulgence” in 2012/2013*

In 2012 Benedict XVI appointed a so-called “Year of Faith” for Roman Catholics, to run from 11 October 2012 to 24 November 2013. According to the Vatican-issued decree, dated 5 October 2012: “On the day of the fiftieth anniversary of the solemn opening of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II... the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI has established the beginning of a Year dedicated particularly to the profession of the true faith and to its correct interpretation, with the reading, or better, with the pious meditation of [upon] the *Acts of the Council* and of the Articles of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*”.<sup>1</sup>

As pointed out by Richard Bennett (an ex-priest) and Timothy F. Kauffman in an article exposing this “Year of Faith”, “The main reason for commemorating the Second Vatican Council during the Year of Faith is because its ecumenical overtures have been so successful”; “...the Year of Faith is nothing else than an effort to continue the marketing and repackaging of Roman dogmas that was started at the Second Vatican Council”; and, “The Year of Faith is claiming to focus on faith, but instead it draws people ever deeper into Rome’s works based salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

This present article, however, is not an examination of Rome’s “Year of Faith”, but rather of the “plenary indulgence” Benedict has granted. According to the Vatican decree, Benedict granted this indulgence to the Roman Catholic faithful on the occasion of this “Year of Faith”, and it will last for the duration of this “Year”.<sup>3</sup>

So what is this all about? It is shocking indeed, a blatant denial of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and solid evidence of Rome’s heathenish doctrine of salvation.

### *But What Is an Indulgence?*

Before we examine this latest papal indulgence, let us understand indulgences in general. What exactly is an “indulgence”?

Here is the definition from the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven,

which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.”<sup>4</sup>

This is not easy to understand, but let us attempt to make it as simple as possible:

According to official Roman Catholic teaching, “The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, when the Roman Catholic sins, he can obtain forgiveness for it (by confessing his sin to a priest and performing some penance given to him by the priest) and hence will not be *eternally* punished for his sin in hell; but he still has to experience a *temporal* punishment for it either here on earth, or after death in a place called Purgatory.<sup>6</sup> An indulgence, then, is not the forgiveness of sin, but the forgiveness of the temporal punishment due because of sin.

But *none* of this is in the Bible at all. It is all a lie.

Rome claims that there is biblical justification for indulgences, as follows: it says that in 1 Cor. 5:1 Paul exercised the power of “binding” (as given by Christ to the disciples in Matt. 16:19 and Matt. 18:18) by inflicting a penance, and excluding this offender from the Church until he performed the penance; and then it says that in 2 Cor. 2:7, Paul exercised the power of “loosing” by remitting the *remainder* of the penance!

But this is so typical of Rome’s distortion of the Scriptures to suit its own purposes. In truth, to “bind” (in Matthew) can have no reference to indulgences, which are only concerned with “loosing”. These verses, then, do not support this lie. And 2 Cor. 2:6-10 clearly refers to the restoration of the offender to the *local church* – it does *not* refer to granting an indulgence.

In fact, the total absence of any biblical justification whatsoever for indulgences has even been admitted by some of Rome’s own scholars and theologians themselves! For example, the Romish “saint”, Antoninus, scholar, author, and archbishop of Florence in the fifteenth century, declared: “We have no testimony in the Scriptures, nor among the Fathers, in favour of indulgences, but only the authority of some modern authors.” And John Chrysostom (347-407 AD), patriarch of Constantinople, whose statue, along with those of Augustine, Athanasius and Ambrose, supports the papal throne in St Peter’s Basilica in Rome, wrote in his book that “Christians” must not imitate the heathens, who made use of indulgences, paying money for the absolution of sins, and imposed penances.<sup>7</sup>

### ***A Monk Makes a Mint from Indulgences***

Indulgences were a major part of what sparked Martin Luther’s protest against the Papacy, for even though Luther was still a Roman Catholic and unconverted, he could not stomach the evil of it all. And nothing more clearly shows the utterly unscriptural nature of indulgences than what occurred when a Dominican monk named Tetzel wended his way through Germany in the early years of the sixteenth century, selling indulgences to any who would part with their money. *Selling* them? Oh yes – indulgences were *bought with money*. Tetzel was rich, unscrupulous, an inquisitor, a convicted adulterer, a man who, though supposedly sworn to celibacy, took two of his children with him on his travels. Tetzel boasted: “I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle [Peter, erroneously claimed by Rome as their first pope<sup>8</sup>] by his sermons. There is no sin so great that an indulgence cannot remit”. “But more than this, indulgences avail not only for the living, but for the dead. For that, repentance is not even necessary.” “Come and I will give you letters, all properly sealed, by which even the sins that you *intend* to commit may be pardoned.” (!) Also these truly blasphemous words: “The Lord our God no longer reigns. He has resigned all power to the pope.” And then his infamous statement: “At the very instant that the money rattles at the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes from Purgatory, and flies liberated to heaven!”

No wonder the poor blind Roman Catholics flocked to purchase that indulgence! Huge crowds gathered to hear Tetzel and to cough up the cash. Coins clattered into his money chest, the purchasers were issued a certificate, and they went on their way rejoicing, secure in the devilish delusion that they had bought their loved one’s soul freedom from the sufferings of Purgatory. And Rome’s coffers filled

up.

After Tetzels time, and because of the massive protests against it during the Reformation, "The Council of Trent... decided [in 1562] that no fees should be collected on granting indulgences."<sup>9</sup> Well, an indulgence may no longer be bought with money, but even so the great evil of *indulgences themselves* continues.

### ***A Treasure Chest Opened... Sometimes***

The pope of Rome grants this indulgence to Roman Catholics under certain prescribed conditions. *If* they fulfil the conditions precisely, *then* they will receive the indulgence. Furthermore, the indulgence can either be *partial* or *plenary*. Rome's Catechism states: "An indulgence is either partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin."<sup>10</sup> In the case of the particular indulgence which Benedict XVI has granted for his appointed "Year of Faith", it will be plenary (full).

But note something more about an indulgence, from the definition given above from the official Catechism of the Roman Catholic institution: the Roman Catholic obtains it "under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints." What is Rome talking about here?

Well, according to its own explanation given in its Catechism, Rome's "treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints" refers to "the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God... This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable and even pristine in their value before God. In this treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints... they attained their own salvation and at the same time co-operated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body."<sup>11</sup>

Cutting through all Rome's theological jargon, what this means is absolutely, shockingly anti-biblical. According to Rome, Mary and the so-called "saints" were all so holy that they attained Heaven by their good works. Note the words: "They attained their own salvation." They earned their own salvation by their good works, or merits. But their works were so good, and so many, that they actually *earned more "credits" than they needed for their own salvation!* And these extra good works, these surplus merits, are supposedly laid up in a "treasury of the Church" of Rome, and can be dispensed to *other* Papists in the form of indulgences by the pope of Rome, when he sees fit, to deliver *them* from temporal punishment due to their sins! Here are the precise words from Rome's Catechism: "An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favour of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins."<sup>12</sup> And: "this treasure [Christ] has committed to the care of St. Peter... and to his successors, his own vicars on earth [the popes of Rome]... who are to distribute it to the faithful for their salvation. And they are to apply it with compassion, for pious and good reasons, in order that it may benefit those who are truly contrite and who have confessed, at times for the complete remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, at times for the partial remission..."<sup>13</sup>

To put it as simply as possible: without any scriptural support whatsoever, Rome claims that some were so perfect on earth that they went to Heaven by the performance of their own works (merits) without going to Purgatory first, and are called "saints"; and their merits were so super-abundant that what they did not need in order to earn their own salvation, are added to a great "treasury of merits"; and from time to time the pope of Rome is able to dip into this treasury, to open this treasure casket for a time, and to dispense these surplus merits to others, so that their temporal punishments for sin can be remitted, either in whole or in part!

Has ever a more iniquitous teaching of salvation appeared on the earth? What devilish lies are proclaimed by this doctrine of indulgences! Let the Word of God condemn this satanic deception.

First, salvation is always and only and entirely by God's grace (His undeserved favour), through faith in Jesus Christ His Son. It is never, ever earned by one's works (merits) (see Eph. 2:8,9). And once sin is forgiven, there is *no* temporal punishment for sin still remaining to be paid! Second, there is no place called Purgatory, where Roman Catholics go to suffer the temporal punishment due for their sins. There is Heaven and there is Hell, and no place in between. If a person comes to Christ by faith, repenting of his sins and trusting in Christ alone for salvation, he is fully and completely saved from his sins, and goes to Heaven immediately when he dies. Third, every single person who is saved by grace through faith is called a saint in Scripture. (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:2). Fourth, since salvation is not by works, it follows that there is no "treasury" where the extra good works of people are stored up. The saints of God cannot even gain merit by their own works for *themselves* – how then can they gain extra for *others*? (see Isa. 64:6; 1 Tim. 1:15). Fifth, the Roman pope cannot open this treasury, for the very simple reason that it does not exist.

And sixth: *if* indeed the pope of Rome has this power to open some great "treasury" which will so wonderfully benefit Roman Catholics, *why does he not open it all the time? Or why does he not just leave it open? Or at the very least, why does he not open it regularly, say once a year? And why are partial indulgences ever granted, instead rather of plenary ones all the time?* If indeed, as the Roman pope, Clement VI, pronounced, "this treasure [Christ] has committed to the care of St. Peter... and to his successors... who are to distribute it to the faithful for their salvation", *then distribute it already!* If, as this same Clement pronounced, "they [the popes of Rome] are to apply it with compassion, for pious and good reasons," *what more compassionate, pious or good reasons could there be than the remission of the temporal punishment of millions at any given time?* Since it is supposedly of such immense benefit to his subjects, one would think he would be magnanimous enough to do this! But no – long years may go by without the Roman pope ever lifting the lid of the treasure chest, and poor Romanists have to supposedly suffer the temporal punishment due to their sins, both in this life and in Purgatory, when their spiritual leader (they believe) could simply unlock the treasury, plunge his bejewelled fingers into it or whatever it is he has to do, and dispense the "infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God", and the "truly immense, unfathomable and even pristine" value of the merits of Mary and the other "saints"! What kind of a monster is this man? How tragic that over a billion people trust him to help them obtain salvation! If he really has such enormous power, Roman Catholics should be battering on the door of the papal residence, demanding that he show compassion and contribute, as only he can according to their belief system, to relieve the temporal sufferings which Roman Catholics have to suffer in this life and the next because of their sins!

Now let us get back to this latest plenary indulgence, granted by Benedict XVI during Rome's present "Year of Faith":

According to this papal decree (in which the writings of the popes Paul VI and Clement VI are quoted): "Because it is above all a question of developing to the highest degree – insofar as it is possible on this earth – holiness of life and hence of obtaining, in the highest degree, purity of soul, very useful will be the great gift of Indulgences, which the Church, in virtue of the power conferred on her by Christ, offers to all those who with the proper dispositions fulfil the special prescriptions to obtain them. 'With the Indulgence – Paul VI taught – the Church, making use of her power of minister of the Redemption wrought by Christ the Lord, communicates to the faithful the participation of this fulness of Christ in the communion of Saints, furnishing them in very large measure the means to attain salvation'.... Manifested thus is the 'treasure of the Church,' 'of which also the merits of the Holy Mother of God and of all the elect, from the first to the last righteous' constitute 'a further increase'."

So: the "Church" of Rome claims it has power from Christ to offer an indulgence to those Papists who fulfil the correct prescriptions. But where in God's Word is such power conferred on this "Church" by the Lord Jesus Christ? Nowhere. It is simply a fiction, invented to exercise control over its subjects. Where in all the Bible are we taught that "the means to obtain salvation" is (among other things) to be found in papal indulgences? Nowhere. It is a lie. Not one verse in all the Bible can be

brought forward to support it.

As for calling Mary the “Mother of God”, this too is a lie: can God have a mother? And if He does, then was Mary’s mother the grandmother of God? See how Rome has turned the humble Mary into a goddess! She was the mother of our Lord’s human nature, but not of His divine nature. And where, from Genesis to Revelation, do we find the teaching that the supposed “merits” of Mary and the “saints” are stored up in some heavenly “treasury”, awaiting the pope’s pleasure as to when the key will be turned in the treasury’s lock and these merits will be dispensed to the people? Again, not in any book, chapter or verse of the entire Bible.

### ***How Roman Catholics Are to Obtain Benedict’s Indulgence***

Benedict’s decree then explains what Roman Catholics are required to do during this “Year of Faith”, in order to obtain this indulgence:

It states: “all individual [Roman Catholic] faithful truly repentant, duly confessed, communing sacramentally, and who pray according to the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff, will be able to acquire a *plenary Indulgence* from the temporal punishment for their sins imparted by God’s mercy, applicable in suffrage to the souls of the deceased faithful.”

And it proceeds to elaborate further:

“a. – Every time they take part in at least three instances of preaching during the Sacred Missions, or at least three lessons on the *Acts of Vatican Council II* and on the Articles of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in any church or ideal place;

“b. – Every time they visit by way of pilgrimage a Papal Basilica, a Christian catacomb, a Cathedral Church, a sacred place designated by the Ordinary of the place for the *Year of Faith*... and take part there in some sacred function or at least pause for an apt time of recollection with pious meditations, concluding with the recitation of the Our Father, the Profession of Faith in any legitimate form, invocations to the Blessed Virgin Mary and, according to the case, to Holy Apostles or Patrons;

“c. – Every time, in days determined by the Ordinary of the place for the *Year of Faith*... in any sacred place they participate in a solemn Eucharistic celebration or the Liturgy of the Hours, adding the Profession of Faith in any legitimate form;

“d. – A day freely chosen, during the *Year of Faith*, for the pious visit of the baptistery or other place, in which they received the sacrament of Baptism, renewing the baptismal promises in any legitimate formula.”

This is straightforward bribery, nothing less! *If* the Roman Catholic does this or that; *if* he hears a certain number of sermons or lessons, *if* he goes on a particular pilgrimage, *if* he “at least pauses for an apt time of recollection with pious meditations”, *if* he prays a certain prayer or invokes certain “saints”, *if* he renews the baptismal promises someone else made for him when he was a baby, etc., etc. – *then*, having *done* these works in the proper manner, he will acquire this indulgence. None of this is in the Bible. It is spiritual bribery, and part of Rome’s false teaching of salvation by one’s own merits.

### ***Hogwash Presented as Christianity***

Again: if indulgences were real, why does Benedict not simply open that “treasure chest” and let them flow out to the people? Why does he not at the very least just leave the treasure chest open, so that the super-abundant merits of the “saints” can benefit the multiplied millions of Roman Catholics today? Even if they were worried that this would cause the chest to be eventually emptied, at least millions of souls would have obtained relief from the temporal punishment due to their sins in this life or in Purgatory!

Ah, but he will not, because he cannot. It is all hogwash. Salvation is “*not* of works”, it is by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and as such is the free “*gift* of God” (Eph. 2:8,9). It is not by a complicated man-made religious system of confessing sins to a priest, performing some penance to

earn forgiveness, being absolved by the priest, then having the supposed temporal punishment for sins remitted by indulgences, either in this life or in a fictional Purgatory. Salvation is a free gift of God, given to all His elect, and it is a complete and perfect salvation. They do nothing to earn or merit it.

Is Roman Catholicism Christian? Is the “Church” of Rome a true Christian church, or a heathenish religion? The answer is obvious to anyone with eyes to see.

### *Under the Curse of the Council*

Oh, and just to end by revealing the true nature of this Whorish religion masquerading as a Christian church: at the Council of Trent, held in the sixteenth century, Rome declared as an official article of faith: “Whereas the power of conferring indulgences was granted by Christ to the Church, and she has... used the said power.... The sacred, holy synod teaches and enjoins that the use of indulgences... is to be retained in the Church, and it *condemns with anathema* those who either assert that they are useless, or who deny that there is in the Church the power of granting them.”<sup>14</sup> Oops... I have just come under her infamous condemnation of anathema. In past ages this would have been my death sentence, and still today this is the Papacy’s desire, all ecumenical overtures notwithstanding. She may use different tactics at present, but the old hatred remains.

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### **ENDNOTES:**

1. *Decree Granting Plenary Indulgence for Year of Faith*, October 5, 2012. Zenit.org.
2. *RC “Year of Faith” Unfaithful to Christ and His Gospel*, by Richard Bennett and Timothy F. Kauffman. Berean Beacon. [www.bereanbeacon.org](http://www.bereanbeacon.org).
3. *Pope Benedict XVI Grants Plenary Indulgence to Faithful*, October 5, 2012. Zenit.org.
4. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1471. Published by Paulines Publications Africa/Mambo Press, 1994.
5. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1473.
6. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1472.
7. *Ex-Priest Answers Attack by Roman Clergy*, by Peter J. Doeswyck, pgs. 6,7. Knights of Christ, Inc., Long Beach, California, 1956.
8. *Pope Peter?* by Shaun Willcock (Gospel tract). Published by Bible Based Ministries, and available for purchase in printed format, or freely downloadable from the website: [www.biblebasedministries.co.uk](http://www.biblebasedministries.co.uk).
9. *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, pg. 484. Revised edition edited by J. Neuner, S.J. and J. Dupuis, S.J. [Jesuits]. Collins Liturgical Publications, London, 1986.
10. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1471.
11. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paras. 1474-1477.
12. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1478.
13. Clement VI, “Jubilee Bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius* (1343).
14. The Council of Trent, “Decree Concerning Indulgences”.

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