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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VII.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
TOUCHING INDULGENCES.

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“But to whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also: for what I also have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, for your sakes have I forgiven it in the person of Christ.”—2 *Cor.* ii. 10.

“WHAT is an Indulgence?”

“An indulgence is the remission of the debt of temporal punishment due to sin after its guilt has been forgiven.”

This question with its answer is familiar to every Catholic child. It is a bald statement of doctrine and is meant to be learnt by heart. Needless to say it receives all necessary amplification in the classes of Christian Doctrine, especially in those destined for the higher school-classes. We will take the definition word by word. *Indulgence* or pardon, or condonation, is the *remission*—not the commutation—; that is to say; an indulgence does not mean that one merited penalty is commuted for another; it is a whole or a partial *remission* of that penalty. *Of the debt of temporal punishment*; not therefore of the *guilt* of the sin—for with this latter an indulgence neither has—nor can have—any concern. *Due to sin the guilt of which has been forgiven.*¹ Therefore not of

¹ Albert the Great, In IV. Sententiarum, *Dist.* XX. xvi. 1-5; ed. Vives, Paris, 1894. Vol. XXIX., Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologicalls*, *Qu.* LXXXIII. *Membrum* ii.; ed. Koburg, Nuremberg, 1482. Thomas Aquinas, Supplement to *Summa Theologica*, *Qu.* XXVII. art. 1.

the punishment which shall become due for *future* sins, but for past sins forgiven.

But *many sins are forgiven her for she hath loved much*. Forgiveness, therefore, supposes — nay demands — love, and love means sorrow for having offended him whom we love. Hence we may say at once that indulgences have nought to do with those who are out of charity with God, who — in other words — are in mortal or deadly sin; neither has it ought to do with those who are already in hell, for they are finally and irremediably out of charity with God. Indulgences, then, have to do solely with those who are on the way to heaven but have not yet reached its portals, hence the expression *temporal* as opposed to *eternal* punishment.

Hence for a person to gain an indulgence he must fulfill certain conditions: he must repent of his sin, he must confess it, he must be prepared to do penance for it; these last two conditions being but manifestations of the first.¹ Innocent III. was at pains to insist that this contrition must affect *all* a man's sins and not merely some of them;² while the clause *vere poenitentibus et confessis*, or its equivalent, occurs in every Papal indult whereby indulgences are granted.³

The foregoing will enable us to understand the nature of an indulgence as set forth in the official declarations of the Church. But there are several points which must be examined if we would arrive at a full appreciation of the doctrine. For it is one thing to say: This is what the Church understands by an indulgence; quite another to say on what precisely the Church bases Her doctrine of indulgences; and still another to explain the exact theological nature of indulgences. It is one

¹ Albert the Great, *l. c.*, XX. xvii., *Responsio*.

² Canons of the Lateran Council, A.D. 1139, Can. XXII.

³ E.g., Clement VI. (1342-1352), The Jubilee Bull of 1343.

thing to say A is B; or: Indulgences are the remission of the debt of temporal punishment due to sin after its guilt has been forgiven; quite another to state the grounds for this assertion; and still another to explain what we mean by it.

The basis, then, of the doctrine is the Power of the Keys: *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*¹ This power is absolute,—*whatsoever*. But the power of the keys is twofold: the power of Order and that of Jurisdiction. The former is concerned with the Sacraments and it is by it that a priest absolves from sins. Moreover, his absolution only touches the guilt, not the punishment due to the sin. *Whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven,*² i.e. the forgiveness which you—by this divinely communicated power—extend to men's sins is ratified in heaven; if wrongly used, the priest himself sins and will be punished, but the person so absolved remains absolved. But such absolution depends for its efficacy on the contrition experienced by the sinner; and contrition means love. When, however, a person has offended another and expresses sorrow for it, the one offended condones his fault, and if punishment is due for the fault he naturally remits it in proportion to the love he feels for the delinquent and in proportion, also, to the love the delinquent exhibits towards himself. But the priest can only judge by externals of the degree of love of God a penitent has, he must take the penitent's word for it. Its degree of intensity he cannot gauge, and consequently he cannot

¹ St. Matt. xvi. 19; for the application of this text to the question of Indulgences, see Albert the Great, *l.c.*, XX. xvii. 1; Alexander of Hales, *l.c.*, *Membrum* vi.; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Suppl.*, *Qu.* xxv. 1, *Sed Contra* II, and *Qu.* xxvii.

² St. John xx. 22-23.

gauge the amount of due penalty which the forgiveness of his sin carries with it. Neither does it concern him; he has nought to do with that, for these effects of the Sacraments are God's concern, not His minister's.

But there is another power of the keys which is improperly so-called, and which should rather be termed a disposition to that power. This power is not concerned with the Sacraments. It is the power of jurisdiction, and its effects are at man's disposition. For it has nought to do with the forgiveness of guilt but with the disposal of the common store of the Church's goods.¹ This power was denied by Wiclif and by the Hussites; thus one of the Propositions which the Council of Trent declared must be put before their followers ran: Whether he believes that the Pope can for a just and pious reason grant to all Christians who are truly contrite and have confessed their sins indulgences for the remission of their sins (i.e. for the remission of the penalties due to their sins),² especially to those who visit the Holy Places and to those who help them to do so?³

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, Supplement to the Summa Theologica, XIX. iii., and esp. XXV. ii. *ad primum*, i.e., the answer to the first difficulty.

² We have added this parenthesis because the customary formula "for the remission of their sins" calls for explanation. In a sin there are two points to be considered—the guilt and the penalty. Sacramental absolution removes the former, indulgences may remove the latter. A sin cannot be said to be fully remitted till both guilt and penalty have been removed. Since, then, this plenary remission is attained only when the penalty has been removed, indulgences are correctly said to be for the remission of sins, without, however, its being implied that by their means the guilt is remitted.

³ Prop. XXVI. from the Bull *Inter cunctas*, Feb. 22, 1418; cp. Decree of Trent, Sess. XXV. *ap. Labbe*, col. 917; also the Profession of faith demanded of the Maronites by Benedict XIV. *ap. Denzinger*, No. 1471.

The Power of the Keys, then, was the principle on which the doctrine of Indulgences was based.¹ But does that doctrine mean that the Church by its power of jurisdiction could simply declare that such and such a person would have to pay no penalty for his sin, or that for such and such a sin no penalty would have to be paid? It is clear that such a doctrine would be blasphemous and would amount to a denial of what we have stated above, viz., that no priestly power can decide how much a man loves God nor, in consequence, to what extent he has won remission of the penalty due to his sin. We said above, however, that this power of jurisdiction was concerned with the disposal of the goods of the common stock of the Church. This "common stock" — if we may be pardoned such an expression — is known as the Treasury of the Church, and it is no exaggeration to say that half the failure to grasp the doctrine of indulgences arises from a failure to grasp the meaning of this Treasury. Yet there is nothing simpler. Any good work done for God has a threefold value: an impetratory value, a meritorious value, and a satisfactory value. These terms need explanation. If a man declines to break one of the Commandments because God has so commanded, or if he gives an alms or says his prayers because God has so ordered, he thereby merits at God's hands a certain reward the nature and extent of which we cannot measure upon this earth. Such merits are his own, he can never hand them on to others, they are laid up for him in heaven, they constitute his record in "the Book of Life," they will avail at the end to be set against his demerits.

It is the fashion to decry such statements, yet no practical

¹One of the errors formally retracted by Jerome of Prague before the Council of Constance in Session XIX. was on this point: "*praesertim de clavidus . . . et indulgentiis . . . consentio.*" Cf. Labbe, XII. col. 164.

theologian will deny that men have to be induced by a system of rewards and punishments to abstain from evil and do good; it is only the purely speculative moralist who strives to insist that the principle that "virtue is its own reward" is an all-sufficing one. Men are not so constructed, and fear must play its part in all our lives; so, too, must hope. But in addition to their meritorious character such good works have the power to win favors from God, whether for ourselves or others. Thus a man can bestow an alms in order to win a grace of which he or some one else stands in need. Further still: a man by his past sins may have incurred a debt of punishment. But it is self-evident that every virtuous act that he subsequently performs has, since it is based on love of God,—without which it would not be a virtuous act,—the effect of diminishing that debt. No man would punish to the same extent one who had offended against him and never performed a subsequent act which proceeded from love of him, and another who had offended against him to the same extent but had by repeated subsequent acts proved his love of him. And it must be the same with God; He can never be outdone in generosity. This is what is known as the satisfactory power of good works; whether they be works of mercy, or observance of the commandments or counsels, or prayers, etc.

Are there such things as works of supererogation, i.e., works without which an individual man would be saved? Or is it necessary to hold that the precise sum of good works which any given individual succeeds in performing by the time he has to quit this mortal sphere is just precisely that which will gain him admission into the courts of heaven, so that—one ejaculation the less—and he would have been eternally lost? Presumably no one nowadays will deny the existence of such works, i.e., of works which are more than

sufficient to win our salvation. But it matters little for our purpose whether we deny or maintain their existence. For this much is certain: the works performed by Christ during His sojourn upon earth were of infinite value, or, as St. Thomas expresses it in his well-known Hymn:

"Cujus una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere."

Hence, even were ordinary mortals incapable of doing one whit more than would insure their salvation, it would at least remain that the Merits of Christ constitute an unfailing source of satisfactions — and it is with satisfactions alone that we are concerned — which can be drawn upon by the Church for the profit of her children.

Can any one doubt that it is within the power of the Church to draw upon this Treasury of the Church as it is called? For whatever view we hold regarding the Church, it must always be true that She is the Bride of Christ, and that She is His Mystical Body of which He is the Head.¹ Consequently we are now in a position to see that an indulgence does not mean that no penalty is paid for the sins of a man who gains an indulgence; but he is given the wherewithal to pay it. St. Thomas asks: "Does an indulgence remit to a man the punishment due for the satisfaction of his sins?"² And he answers:—

"All admit that indulgences have some value; for it would be blasphemy to say that the Church does anything vainly. But some say that they do not avail to free a man from the debt of punishment which he has deserved in Purgatory according to God's judgment; but merely that they serve to free him from the obligation imposed on him by the priest by way of punishment for his sins or from the canonical penalties he has incurred."

¹ Cf., *inter alia*, Eph. ii. 13-22; iv. 14-16; v. 23-33.

² *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, XXV. 1.

This opinion he rejects, and proceeds thus:—

“Indulgences hold good both in the Church’s courts and in the judgment of God for the remission of those penalties which remain after contrition, confession and absolution, whether these penalties are enjoined or not. And the reason why they so avail is the Oneness of the Mystical Body in which many have performed works of satisfaction exceeding the requirements of their debts; in which, too, many have patiently borne unjust tribulations whereby a multitude of penalties would have been paid had they been incurred. So great is the quantity of such merits that it exceeds the entire debt of punishment due to those who are at this moment living. And this is especially due to the merits of Christ; for though He acts through the Sacraments, yet His efficacy is in no wise restricted to them but rather infinitely exceeds the efficacy of the Sacraments.

“Now one man can satisfy for another, as we have explained elsewhere.¹ And the Saints in whom is found this superabundance of satisfactions did not perform their good works for this or that definite person who needed the remission of his penalties—had they done so such persons would have received the remission of their penalties without any indulgence (from the Church)—but they performed them for the good of the Church in general, just as the Apostle says that he *fills up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ . . . for His Body which is the Church* (Col. 1. 24). The merits, then, of the Saints are the common property of the entire Church. But those things which are the common property of a number are distributed to the various individuals according to the arbitrament of him who rules them all. Hence just as one man will obtain the remission of his penalties if another satisfies for him, so will he too if another’s satisfactions be applied to him by one who has the power to do so.”

St. Thomas then answers the difficulty that every crime has its own peculiar and proportionate punishment and that consequently there can be no vicarious remission of it. “The remission,” he answers, “which comes through the medium of indulgences does not destroy the due proportion between the crime and its punishment since some one has spontaneously undertaken the punishment due to another’s guilt.” Or, again, he puts the difficulty: It is God Who imposes the penalty for

¹ Supplement, XIII. ff.

crime; how then can a man free the criminal from his deserved punishment? And the Saint answers: "He who gains an indulgence is not, strictly speaking, absolved from the debt of punishment, but he is given the means whereby he may pay it." And once more: The punishment is an integral part of the Sacrament of penance, hence no mere human being can remit it. But the Saint answers:—

"The effect of Sacramental absolution is the removal of a man's guilt, an effect which is not produced by indulgences. But when a person gains an indulgence he pays the penalty he owes for his faults out of the common stock of the Church's goods."¹

It will be worth while quoting *in extenso* the words of St. Thomas's master, Albertus Magnus, on the Treasury of the Church. He is discussing various definitions for an indulgence:—

"The definitions already given may stand. But if any one were to propose to define an indulgence as the remission by the power of the keys of a penalty that has been imposed, and a remission due to the treasure of works of supererogation accumulated by those who are perfect—I think his would be the better definition. For in this definition the term '*remission*' is used generically. But since there is remission of guilt—and this comes from God alone, and remission of penalty—which God and man bring about, we therefore add the word *penalty*. And since again there is the eternal punishment which God remits, and the temporal punishment of the satisfaction enjoined which man remits, we therefore add the word *enjoined*. And once more, since he alone can grant such remission who has jurisdiction and the keys, we therefore add *by the power of the keys*. Lastly, since there can be no due and fitting remission of a penalty enjoined on a person for his sins without compensation be made by some other who has more than satisfied his debts, we therefore add *due to the treasure of works of supererogation accumulated by those who are perfect*. For in this treas-

¹ See also Supplement, XXVI. l.; XXVII. iv., for further information regarding the Treasury of the Church. *Qu.* XXVI. ii. should especially be studied as giving St. Thomas's teaching on the government of the Church; he there explains how it is that a Parish Priest cannot give indulgences.

ury the Church has all the riches of the merits of the Passion of Christ, of the most glorious Virgin Mary, and of all the Apostles and Martyrs, and of the Saints of God, living as well as dead. And according to the needs and advantage of the Church these can be expended in suffrage for those who serve the Church in her needs."¹

These words are precise regarding the treasury of merits. But the cautious reader who compares Albert's words with those of his disciple Thomas will note a very striking difference on an essential point. For Albert insists on the word *enjoined*. Thomas says: *whether enjoined or not*.² The distinction is vital. For Albert, while holding as he does³ that indulgences avail for the souls in Purgatory, never seems to speak of indulgences as delivering a man from penalties inflicted by God, but only from those enjoined by men. So that in his view the only purgatorial pains which indulgences could affect would be those obligations imposed by man during life and not fulfilled. This opinion St. Thomas explicitly rejects, though he does not name Blessed Albert as its patron:—

"Some say that indulgences do not avail to free a person from the debt of punishment which according to God's judgment he has deserved in Purgatory, but only that they avail to free him from whatever obligation the priest has imposed on him by way of penance or to which he may be obliged by some canonical statutes. But this opinion does not seem to be true. For in the first place it is directly opposed to the privilege given to Peter to whom it was said that *whatsoever* he should remit upon earth that also should be remitted in heaven. Whence it follows that a remission declared in the Church's courts holds good also in God's court. Moreover, if the Church were to grant indulgences in the aforesaid fashion she would be doing more harm to a man than good, for by absolving him from the penalties she had inflicted she would only be postponing them for worse ones, those namely of Purgatory."

St. Thomas then goes on to establish the view we have al-

¹ In IV. Sententiarum, *Dist.* XX. art. xvi., *Solutio*.

² Supplement, *ut supra*, XXV. 1., *et supra*, p. 296. Supplement, XXV. 1.

³ *Dist.* XX. art. xvi., *Solutio*.

Vol. LXXI. No. 282. 9

ready given. We cannot but admire the modesty with which he abstains from naming his teacher whose views he felt bound to oppose.¹ Albert's view seems to have been that of Alexander of Hales.²

Before discussing further the question of the applicability of indulgences to the souls in Purgatory, the following declarations touching the Treasury of the Church should be noted. The doctrine was insisted on by Clement VI. in the Bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, January 25, 1343. After speaking of the merits of Christ's Passion, the Pontiff goes on to say:—

“And lest the pity shewn in the shedding so much Blood should be rendered vain or superfluous He thus acquired for His Church militant a mighty treasure, our loving Father being desirous of enriching His children that so there might be *an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God* (Wisdom vii. 14). And this treasure He left in trust to be dispensed for the profit of the faithful by Blessed Peter the key-bearer of heaven, and by his successors, His vicars on earth; it was to be mercifully applied, now for the total, now for the partial remission of the temporal punishments due to sin, both in general and in particular, according as they shall, in God, judge to be expedient, to those who are truly penitent and have confessed their sins. To this accumulation of treasures the merits of the Blessed Mother of God and of all the Elect, from the first just man to the last, all contribute. Nor need we fear lest it be exhausted, for both Christ's merits are infinite, and the more numerous are those who are brought to a state of justice by their application the more does the treasury of merits thereby increase.”

In the Bull *Exsurge Domine*, June 15, 1520, Leo X. condemned forty-one propositions taken from the works of Luther; the seventeenth Proposition runs:—

“The Treasury of the Church whence the Pope grants indulgences, is not the merits of Christ and the Saints.”³

¹ Supplement, XXV. 1.

² *L.c.*, *Membrum v.*

³ Cf. also St. Thomas, Supplement, XXV. 1.; XXVI. 1., 11.; XXVII. 1v.

Previous to this the Council of Constance had condemned, in the Council and in the Bulls *Inter cunctas* and *In eminentis*, forty-five Propositions held by Wiclif; the forty-second Proposition runs:—

“It is folly to believe in indulgences granted by Popes and Bishops.”

Again, among the errors held by the Synod assembled at Pistoia, the forty-first, condemned by Pius VII. in the Constitution *Auctorem Fidei*, August 28, 1794, runs as follows:—

“[We condemn] their declaration that the Scholastics, inflated by their subtleties, devised a grossly understood treasury of the merits of Christ and the Saints; and substituted for the clear notion of absolution from canonical penalties their confused and false idea of the application of merits: as though the treasury of the Church whence the Pope grants indulgences were not the merits of Christ and the Saints: their declaration is false, rash, and an injury to the merits of Christ and the Saints!”

II.

We have already touched upon the question of the applicability of indulgences to the souls in Purgatory. The difficulty of the question will be clear from the divergence of opinion between Albert the Great and St. Thomas. For if we say that indulgences can be applied to the relief of the souls in Purgatory we have to face grave difficulties. The pains of Purgatory are the result of God's judgment on a man after this life. What, then, can the Pope, who is but the Head of the Church *on earth*, have to say to the remission of such penalties? Again: souls go to Purgatory to be purified. But if they gain a remission of these penalties by another's merits being applied to them what becomes of their purification? These two difficulties may be taken as typical of all the rest; the former concerns the power of the Pope, the latter the

capacity of the dead for profiting by it — on the supposition that it exists. We may, however, add a third difficulty, what we may term an ethical one: the doctrine of indulgences is destructive of morality since it enables a man to sin and then get off scot-free by reason of another person's merits!¹

First of all, it must be remarked that the power given to Peter and his successors is absolute, as Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and St. Thomas all say. There is no qualifying clause but simply: *Whatsoever thou shalt loose . . . shall be loosed also in heaven*. We shall do well to reflect on the hopeless character of the *impasse* in which we should find ourselves were it conceivable that the Church of God should throughout the ages have deceived Herself on so vital a point as the interpretation of the Promises which constitute Her charter. Individual abuse of power is not to be mistaken for traditional and fundamental misinterpretation of it.

And as to the first difficulty: What is the precise relation between the Vicar of Christ upon earth and the members of the Church suffering in Purgatory? In the first place, the Church Suffering is not the Church Triumphant, its members are not with God, they do not yet enjoy the Beatific Vision. Now, both Alexander of Hales and Blessed Albert put this very difficulty, and in formulating it they both insist on the fact that there is a seeming qualifying clause in the Promise made to Peter, since it is said: "Whatsoever thou shalt loose *upon earth*," and they urge that the souls in Purgatory are most emphatically *not upon earth*. The difficulty could hardly be

¹The applicability of indulgences to the souls in Purgatory was denied by Pedro Martinez of Osma. His errors were condemned by Sixtus IV. in the Bull *Licet ea* of Aug. 9, 1478; the sixth condemned Proposition runs: "*The Pope cannot grant to any living person an indulgence from the pains of Purgatory.*" Cf. Denzinger, No. 720.

stated more convincingly. But Albert cuts the knot by remarking that, after all,

“those who are in Purgatory are in a certain sense *still upon earth*, since *during life* they merited what should avail to bring them a more speedy relief from penalties after death. For Purgatory is in a sense both the journey and the journey's end. Those who are there are confirmed in grace and can sin no more, hence they may be said to have come to their journey's end; but since they have not yet reached the term of their purification they are still on their journey and still on the way to their Fatherland.”¹

Albert thus answers the difficulty as far as the words *on earth* are concerned, but he has not answered the other difficulty, which regards the Pope's power over those in Purgatory.

Alexander of Hales, however, faces the difficulty clearly when he says: “Indulgences cannot avail for the dead, since they have passed to God's tribunal.” And he solves it by saying: “God's tribunal is twofold, that of His justice and that of His mercy.” The souls in Purgatory stand before the latter. And this enables him to draw the conclusion that the Church applies indulgences to those in Purgatory *by way of suffrage and intercession, not by way of judicial absolution.*² These combined answers are perfect. In a certain sense the souls in Purgatory are *upon earth*, for it is here they worked out their salvation, it is here they accumulated merits, it is here they lived in charity and devotion; their mortal pilgrimage is over, their repose in the Fatherland has not yet begun. They have passed from the Church's tribunal on earth to the tribunal of God and they have been deemed worthy of His mercy. But that mercy is as yet but inchoative, it has not yet reached its fullest realization. They belong neither to the court of heaven nor to the court of earth, but in a sense have a claim to the sympathies of either. What

¹ *Dist.* XX. xviii., reply to the first difficulty.

² *L.c.*, *Membrum* v.

can the Blessed in heaven do for them? They can offer up their own merits to God and the Lamb, trusting that these will appeal for those who are suffering and will work for the curtailment of their pains. What can the courts of earth, of the Church on earth, do for them? The Church retains no jurisdiction over them. Yet She has at Her disposal the treasury of the Church. How can She apply it to those who have passed beyond Her jurisdiction? Clearly She cannot do so by any authoritative act. But this does not preclude Her from asking of God that the stores of that treasury may be applied to those of Her children who are now in their greatest need. And this She does by saying to Her children who have not yet passed beyond the veil: "Say certain prayers, perform certain good works, and you shall thereby be enabled — always supposing that you are truly contrite and have confessed your sins — to gain so much indulgence *applicable to the souls in Purgatory.*" *Applicable*, we note, not *applied*; for this the Church cannot do; She can only ask — in confidence that they be so applied.

And the second difficulty: souls go to Purgatory to be purified. But if they escape these purifying fires by the application of another's merits to them, what becomes of their purification? Firstly, it is not the Church Who applies these merits, as we have seen; it is God Himself Who does so — if He sees fit — at the Church's prayer. Consequently it is not the Church Who is to blame if ought is wanting. Secondly, it is not to be supposed that the debt has not been paid — though not by the person in question; it has been paid in its entirety by another. Thirdly, we are not to suppose that some sinner thereby wins entrance into the kingdom of heaven unpurified, or before his time, or without correspond-

ing merits. No one has spoken more convincingly on this point than St. Augustine:—

“We cannot deny that the souls of the departed are relieved by the plety of those they have left behind and who either cause the Sacrifice of the Mediator to be offered for them or who give alms in the Church for their profit. But these things avail the departed *if during life they merited that such things should profit them.* For there is a kind of life which is neither so good as not to need such things after death, nor so evil as to be unable to profit by them after death; though there are some so good as not to need them, and some so wicked as to be unable to profit by them when they have passed from this life. Consequently *it is here [on earth] that all merit is acquired by which a man can purchase relief after death — or the contrary.* Let no one imagine that at his death he will merit from God what he has neglected during life. Hence when the Church is busy in commending to God those who have departed She is in no way acting contrary to the words of the Apostle who said: ‘*We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or evil*’ (2 Cor. v. 10). And this because each individual won for himself while in the flesh this reward:—that such things [the Church’s offerings] should avail for him.”¹

Lastly, we must face the moral or ethical difficulty. Is the doctrine of indulgences an immoral one? Does it, in other words, tend to diminish a man’s sense of personal responsibility? We trust that much of what we have already said will serve to show how false is any such idea. For one of the essential conditions for gaining an indulgence is contrition. What is contrition? It is a hearty sorrow for having offended God, together with a firm purpose of amendment. No man who says: “I need not fear punishment for I can always gain an indulgence” (!) can be termed “contrite”; still less can he be said to have a firm purpose of amendment. If he does think so, then he simply fails to gain the indulgence—

¹ Enchiridion, CIX. (29); cp. De Civ. Dei, XXI. ix., xi., xiii., xvi.; De Gen. ad Litt. XII. 60; Confess. IX. vi. 35; De Cura Mortuorum, XVIII. (22); Enarr. in Ps. XXXVI. l. 10; etc.

since he lacks a necessary condition. Nor can such a man say: "I do not fear Purgatory because I have gained a quantity of indulgences"! Who knows whether he has gained an indulgence? No one knows for certain. He can only trust to God's mercy and to His fidelity to His promises. But the moment a man said: "I do not fear Purgatory because I have gained indulgences"! he would be giving the very best proof of the insufficiency of his dispositions to profit by indulgences when his time came to go to Purgatory — always on the supposition that he gets there at all! No, a Catholic knows that if he would profit by the indulgence he has himself gained or which others may gain for him when he is in Purgatory, he must take good care to so live here during his time on earth as to insure his profiting by them, as St. Augustine had told us.

But is it not possible that a man may form a very low standard of action for himself if he pays much attention to the doctrine of indulgences? May he not, for instance, be content to shorten his time in Purgatory by gaining indulgences and reck but little of real growth in virtue? At first sight this seems a most specious difficulty. But when we reflect that to gain an indulgence a man must keep himself free from sin as far as he can, that he must keep himself in the grace or favor of God, that he must have real contrition for his sins and a firm purpose of amendment for them, then it becomes hard to see how such a man can fail — if he is to persevere in this state — to be really supernatural-minded. And this is the precise function of indulgences according to the mind of the Church. No man who thinks much about indulgences can fail to dwell much on the thought of Purgatory, on the danger of missing even Purgatory and finding himself in hell; he thinks much of those who have gone before him and who may be in need

of his intercessions; and thus his mind becomes gradually weaned from the things of earth, and his *conversation is in heaven*. It may be worth our while to attend to this exceedingly pertinent question: Which is of more avail to our salvation; to gain a number of indulgences or to perform a large number of good works? Now I do not know how it will strike other people but of this I am certain: if the above question were proposed to a Catholic he would exclaim, "What an absurd question! Why, indulgences *are* good works, you can't distinguish them!" And if he were pressed, I have again no doubt that he would explain that everything is a good work just in proportion as it springs from charity or love of God.

The question, then, is reduced to this: Which is more conducive to our growth in the love of God; the gaining of indulgences or the performances of many works of mercy? It is a commonplace that the performance of good works has a tendency to produce a certain self-exaltation, though this may easily be checked. But it is hard to see where the tendency to self-exaltation can creep in when a man is engaged in gaining indulgences; especially if he does so with a view to helping not so much himself as others. For the whole idea of an indulgence is, as we have seen already, an appeal to the throne of God's mercy as distinct from the throne of His justice. Hence it involves a perpetual self-abandonment, a realization of our own inability to do anything. Its essential condition is contrition for our own sins; it involves care in keeping ourselves in the grace of God as far as we can; it begets an atmosphere of the supernatural, an otherworldness, if we may so term it, which disarms all tendency to occupation with self. And if we put the difficulty in another way, and urge that by gaining indulgences we fail to perform the

satisfactions called for by our sins and thus lose a potent remedy against falling into further sins, then we have to face this further question: Which is the more potent remedy against falling into sin; the habitual occupation with good works, or the grace of God? And if we answer—as of course we must—that it is the grace of God, then we have to face yet another question: Which is the more productive of the grace of God in our souls; the gaining of indulgences or the performance of good works? But no indulgence can be granted unless it be for the honor of God and the profit of the members of Christ's Body, i.e. the Church. And no man will toil strenuously in the work of gaining indulgences unless he have these two objects before him more or less distinctly; and the more he does so the more will he be stirred up to love of God and His Church Militant upon earth or Suffering in Purgatory; and the more he loves the more fit will he be for the inflow of grace which is the chiefest remedy against sin. In saying this we are not for a moment implying that the same effect is not produced by the performance of other good works; for, as already said, no works are good save in so far as they spring from charity or love of God, and consequently dispose us to love of God. But we do most emphatically declare that the safer way is that of indulgences—because it is the lowliest!

Yet it might be urged that, in the main, people are actuated by selfish motives in trying to gain indulgences and that it is this somewhat sordid aspect of it that offends! We must candidly say that we do not think this is the case. For so ingrained in the Catholic's mind is the sense that he can win succor for those who most need it and who are many of them very dear to him, that we fancy we shall not be far wrong if we say that Catholics hardly ever think of themselves when

endeavoring to gain indulgences. Their thoughts turn inevitably to that land of suffering where, as St. Augustine has shown us, they go whose lives have been neither so good as to win them immediate entrance into rest, nor so bad as to finally exclude them therefrom. How long are they detained without the gate? We know not. How intensely do they suffer? Again we know not. But this we do know: it is the soul that suffers, since the body has not yet risen from the dead. And suffering in the soul must far transcend any suffering of which the body is capable, since, after all, it is only the presence of the soul in the body that enables the latter to experience feeling or suffering. Hence it is that both St. Augustine and St. Thomas unhesitatingly assert that the very least pain of Purgatory far exceeds anything that we can ever be called upon to endure in this present life.¹

Truth to tell, far from the doctrine of indulgences being immoral in its tendencies or liable to make men less careful regarding sin and its punishments, it has the very contrary effect. No man can be intent upon gaining indulgences without thereby becoming more and more alive to the enormity of sin and to the terrible nature of its punishment. We live, it is true, under the New Dispensation, the Law of Grace, but — unless we are Manicheans — we know the jealous God of the Old Testament to be One and the Same with the Saviour Who was Meek and Humble of Heart in the New. The New Covenant has not abrogated the Old in the sense that the penalties of sin are any the less. Dare we say that the mod-

¹ Appendix to *Summa Theologica*, *Quest. II. art. 1.*, *Scd Contra* 1. and St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. XXXVII. 3: quamvis salvi per ignem, gravior tamen erit ille ignis quam quidquid potest homo pati in hac vita.* Those who wish to know what St. Augustine's views were regarding Purgatory should read the whole Sermon. It will repay them.

ern world is conspicuous for its sense of sin, for its spirit of fear? We dare not. May it not be that the neglect of the irrefragable doctrine of a Purgatory whence we shall not emerge till we have paid that terrible *last farthing* has much to do with this? The Catholic doctrine of indulgences does more to foster this attitude of fear than any ethical teaching of modern days. And at the same time it fosters in us a lively sense of the stupendous mercies of God. It is for this reason that it is so conspicuous a feature of Catholic life.

But there is another point which must not be passed over. A man might — it is at least conceivable — devote himself to the task of gaining indulgences for himself alone. He might in a spirit of niggardliness say: “I will insure that I at least shall have no Purgatory”! It is hard to believe that any one with a truly Catholic sense would so speak, but it is at least conceivable. What then? St. Thomas answers this very point:—

“Although indulgences avail much for the remission of penalties, yet works of satisfaction are far more meritorious for winning essential reward [i.e. the Vision of God in its varying degrees: *Star differeth from star in glory*] and this infinitely transcends the remission of temporal punishment.”¹

St. Thomas sets forth the same startling doctrine in very emphatic terms; he puts the question whether it is not possible that a rich man should pass through Purgatory more quickly than a poor man, since the former has been able to win many prayers and indulgences owing to the alms he has been able to give. The answer gives food for reflection:—

“There is nought to prevent rich people from being in a certain sense better off than the poor [in Purgatory], better off, that is, as expiating their sins more speedily; but this is nought in comparison with the possession of the kingdom of heaven in which re-

¹ Supplement, XXV. II., answer to the second difficulty.

spect the poor are declared to be better off: *Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.*"¹

It is the same distinction as that already drawn between the essential and the accidental reward, the former being the Vision of God—the possession of Him, the latter being the speedier attainment of that Vision. It does not follow that they who attain the most speedily to that Vision are those who have the most right to it, nor that they are the brightest stars—*where star differeth from star in glory.*

To furnish the reader with some idea of the extent to which the precise nature of indulgences was discussed during the Middle Ages it will be worth while to analyze St. Thomas's discussion of the question: *Have indulgences the efficacy claimed for them?*² He begins by pointing out that a negative answer to the question will involve a charge of untruthfulness against the Church—which is unthinkable. He then sets forth various opinions which had been held on the question. Thus "some maintain that indulgences have not the efficacy claimed for them, but that they simply avail to each individual in proportion to his faith and devotion. And consequently those who maintain this say that the Church sets forth Her indulgences in the style adopted by Her simply in order to induce men to do well, and that this is a species of pious fraud,³ like a mother who induces her child to walk by holding out an apple before him." This opinion St. Thomas rejects on the ground that just as errors in Holy Scripture

¹ Supplement, LXXI. xii., answer to the third difficulty.

² Supplement, XXV. ii. *Utrum indulgentiarum tantum valeant quantum pronuntiantur?* which might be rendered colloquially: *Do Indulgences mean all they say?*

³ This very expression *pious fraud* was used by Luther. Cf. Prop. XVIII., among the condemned errors of Luther, Bull Exsurge Domine, June 15, 1520.

would destroy its authority, so errors in the Church's teaching would destroy Her authority in questions of faith.

He then sets forth another opinion held by some:—

“Hence others have maintained that indulgences mean all that is claimed for them *according to a just estimate*, not that of him who grants it,—for he may put a higher value upon it than it merits,—nor that of the recipient,—for he may prize too highly the gift he receives;—but a just estimate according to the estimate of good men who consider the condition of the person affected and the profit and needs of the Church, for the Church's needs are greater at one time than another.”

This opinion he also rejects on the grounds that it would turn indulgences into a mere commutation so that they would not be really a remission; also that it does not absolve the Church from the charge of untruthfulness, since sometimes indulgences are granted in a way which would hardly satisfy the just estimate arrived at on the basis suggested, as, for example, the indulgence of seven years for the Roman Stations¹ granted by Pope St. Gregory the Great. Hence a third opinion:—

“The quantity of remission accorded in an indulgence is not to be measured by the *devotion of the recipient*, as the first opinion suggested; nor according to the *quantity* of what is given, as in the second opinion; but according to the *cause* for which the indulgence is granted and according to which a person is held deserving of obtaining such an indulgence. Thus according as a man approximated to that cause so would he attain remission in whole or in part.”

This third opinion St. Thomas also rejects on the ground that the Church assigns now a greater, now a lesser indulgence for the same cause, thus now a year, now only forty days' indulgence is granted for visiting the same church. He then declares his own opinion:—

“The quantity of an effect is proportionate to the quantity of

¹ Tertullian, De Oratone, XIX.

the cause. Now the cause of the remission of punishment effected by indulgences is no other than the abundance of the Church's merits, and this abundance suffices for the remission of all penalty. The effective cause of the remission is not the devotion, or toll, or gifts of the recipient; nor, again, is the cause for which the indulgence was granted the effective cause of this remission. We cannot, then, estimate the quantity of remission by any of the foregoing, but solely by the merits of the Church—and these are always superabundant. Consequently, according as these merits are applied to a person so does he obtain remission. That they should be so applied demands, firstly, authority to dispense this treasure; secondly, union between the recipient and him who merited it—and this is brought about by charity;—thirdly, there is required a reason for so dispensing this treasury, the intention, namely, of those who wrought these meritorious works must be safeguarded: and they did them for the honor of God and the profit of the Church in general. Hence whenever the cause assigned tends to the utility of the Church and the honor of God, there is sufficient reason for granting an indulgence. This being so, others hold that indulgences have precisely the efficacy claimed for them, provided that he who grants them has authority, that the recipient has charity, and that as regards the cause there should be piety which embraces the honor of God and the profit of our neighbor. Nor does such a view extend unduly the tribunal of the Divine Mercy as some maintain, nor again does it derogate from the Divine Justice: for no penalty is remitted, it is only that the penalty paid by one is computed to another."

III.

We are now in a position to examine some of the statements which were made in the April Number of this Review [1913]. The writer of the paper on "The System of Indulgences" concludes by an enumeration of ten "abuses" of the doctrine of indulgences. He prefaces his list by saying that the objections to the doctrine "are 'legion'" and may be suggested by the following observations:—

"1. The doctrine of Indulgences introduces a *contradiction* into the Catholic system, inasmuch as the works of satisfaction, which were originally an integral part of the sacrament of penitence

[*sic*, he should write *penance*], are now entirely disconnected from it, and viewed as a matter of ecclesiastical jurisdiction."

He apparently does not know that the imposition of a salutary penance is a part of the Sacrament, and an integral part of it; moreover, the penitent is bound, under pain of nullity, to *accept* this penance. As we have pointed out above, the power of granting indulgences does not come under the Sacramental power, and in consequence has absolutely nothing to do with the Sacrament of Penance, which it leaves intact.¹

"2. Again, it has this radical defect that moral and religious things, which can be taken only as *spiritual* magnitudes, are here treated as *material* ones, quality being treated as quantity. Indeed, in estimating the merit of Christ's work, it is found not so much in the sacrifice and love, as in the quantity of blood shed."

What conceivable foundation has the writer for this statement? Christ's Blood is Infinite in *quality*, the *quantity* is of no account (cf. above, p. 296). Moreover, were there no merits of the Saints, the Treasury of the Church would remain intact, for the simple reason that the price of our Redemption was an *Infinite* one, and therefore inexhaustible. Needless to add that the Blood of Christ is Infinite in quality because it is That of the God-Man.

"3. Moreover, in respect of the merits of the saints, these are found not in their moral character, but in the *volume* of good works."

There seems to be some loose thinking here! What is the distinction between *good* works and *moral* works? Surely they are good *because moral*? Again, the *volume* of the merits of the Saints comes into question precisely because — unlike the merits of the Infinite Redeemer — they are *finite* and hence can be enumerated. And, as remarked above, the Church

¹ Supplement, XXV. II., answer to the first difficulty, and *supra*, pp. 292 f.

is not dependent on them for the inexhaustible character of Her treasury.

“4. Again, we do not think that the Scripture allusions to fasts and alms will warrant the church in enjoining them as a perpetual method of penance.”

We might answer this in the negative. Fasts and alms are enacted partly because of the Scriptural warrant for them, partly because such practices serve to counteract two radical tendencies which, so far as we have observed, are not yet rooted out—the pampering of our bodies and the love of money. Had the writer any first-hand acquaintance with the literature on Indulgences, he would know that many other practices are enjoined, e.g., pilgrimage—though this has fallen into comparative disuse—and prayer. It would be no exaggeration to say that ninety-nine per cent of the present-day indulgences are granted on condition of the recitation of certain prayers. Is this “immoral”?

“5. Further, they make the imputation of Christ's merit (and the saints') to be a purely external transference: for, although they make a penitent mind essential, yet the merit is not received in virtue of the state of mind, but in return for the good works done by one for the church; and the work itself is quite external and isolated.”

Loose thinking again! In what conceivable way can a “penitent mind” be “*essential*” and “yet the merit not be received *in virtue of* the state of mind”? Moreover, what can be meant by the remark the “work itself is quite external and isolated”? “External” to what? “Isolated” from what? One is surely tempted to exclaim with the Irishman who had had to listen to a preacher of more words than ideas: “Shure, he is not preaching at all! He is only talking!”

“6. Moreover, the transference of merit is not a moral or religious act, but purely judicial and perfunctory, so that the dis-
Vol. LXXI. No. 282. 10

penser might himself be in mortal sin and still not invalidate the procedure, as long as he shared the judicial power of the church. The whole was thus a legal institution computed in ecclesiastical arithmetic, and in bold contrast to the spiritual nature of the kingdom."

And why not? A judge may be a murderer and yet validly and licitly condemn a fellow-murderer. And why should we not have "ecclesiastical arithmetic"? If the writer of the article is an ecclesiastic himself he probably has a church, and if so he has to charge seat-rents! Or if he has not got to charge them then at least he has to pay them! "Ecclesiastical arithmetic" surely?

Before we leave the question of "ecclesiastical arithmetic" we may draw attention to a piece of this "arithmetic" which often seems a stumbling block. The Church has attached to the Ejaculatory Prayer: *My Jesus, Mercy!* 100 days indulgence. What does this piece of "arithmetic" mean? It cannot mean that any one who gains it will have 100 days less Purgatory; for when we get to Purgatory — always providing that we are fortunate enough to get there — time will have finished for us and we cannot reckon our sojourn there in terms of time. The explanation is simple: if we gain such an indulgence, then as much of the temporal punishment due to us is remitted as would have been remitted had we performed 100 days of the old canonical penances of the early Church. How much is that? A great deal, for those penances were severe. But its precise quantity is known only to God — and with Him we are content to leave it.

"7. This doctrine rests not only upon the theory of good works, but also that a man may do more good than is essential to his own salvation, and may thus add to a store, or treasure, of the church."

Perhaps there is no need to dwell on this after what has

been said. No man in his senses will deny the possibility of works of supererogation. But even supposing that such things did not exist, it is completely false to suppose that the doctrine of indulgences "rests" upon *our* works of supererogation as distinct from the redemptive work of Christ. For the treasury of the Church is the merits of Christ which are inexhaustible because infinite; to this treasury the merits of the Saints can be added, but if they were removed the treasury — since infinite — would in no way be lessened. Perhaps the writer of the article would like to call this "ecclesiastical mathematics"! He is quite welcome to do so.

"8. Again, it invades the religious domain, and attacks the very glory of God by its theory of an unerring and omniscient judicial power in the church. It makes the tribunal of the church and the tribunal of God to be identical. And the Pope is the head of the church, and hence it exalts him to the place of God, and asks the Omnipotent to share with him His glory."

If these unblushing assertions were true the Church would be guilty of the grossest blasphemy! Our readers will naturally understand our unwillingness to say what we think of the offensive passage just given. We have it on high authority that *charity covereth a multitude of sins*; we may adapt the words to *ignorance*. But while it is true that ignorance is an excuse for much, it may be worth while for the writer of the paper to read attentively — we will not say a Treatise on Indulgences by any Catholic authority, for that of course he has done, else he naturally would not have written the article we are incriminating, but — the passage in St. Luke xii. 47-48.

But to come to criticism: how can the writer interpret the Promise to Peter in St. Matthew xvi. 18 otherwise than of an unerring tribunal in the Church? We are really curious to know. Again, on the supposition that these Promises do really establish an unerring tribunal in the Church, how can

the action of such a tribunal be termed an invasion of the "religious domain"? and how can they be said "to attack the very glory of God" when it is the God-Man who established the tribunal? The only way out of the difficulty that we can see is to deny the Divinity of Christ. Yet is this really a loophole? For if the writer denies the Divinity he must at least allow the goodness of the Christ. Yet where is the "goodness" — or the justice — of declaring in the most emphatic terms of which language is capable the establishment of such a tribunal if the very idea of such a tribunal involves a blasphemy? The writer could hardly have furnished a more striking example of the truth that to deny any one doctrine of the Church involves the denial of them all; we cannot reject one without cutting at the root of them all — viz., the Divinity of the Founder of the Church! But — as all through his article — it is loose thinking which lies at the root of the difficulty. The argument should have been expressed as follows: "The doctrine of indulgences *supposes* the Pope as the Head of the Church; consequently it supposes him to stand in the place of Christ as His Vicegerent; and it realizes in all humility that the Omnipotent has asked him to share with Him His glory." Lastly, we may be pardoned for repeating that in the case of indulgences applicable to the souls in Purgatory the Church does not act in a judicial manner, for the precise reason that these souls have passed from Her jurisdiction to the tribunal of God. Hence She only *prays* that such indulgences may be applied to them.

"9. Granting, however, that the whole doctrine were well founded, the position assigned to the Pope would be one elevated far above the reach of fancy, and could be designated only as that of a terrestrial god. What an infinite amount of obligation would it impose upon the Papacy, and with what conscientiousness, sharpened to the utmost, ought the popes, if they were bold enough to

believe that such plenitude of power had actually been lodged in the hands of any child of the dust, to dispense the lofty blessings committed to their trust! How carefully ought they to have guarded them from debasement! and yet what do we see? Abuse upon abuse, and profanation upon profanation, in ascending scale, for more than two centuries, until at last moral indignation bursts like a tempest upon their implety.'” (Ullmann.)

The simplest reply to this rhetoric of Ullmann's would be that abuse of a gift does not touch the real nature of the gift. Or, that the more amazing the condescension the more open it is to abuse. But what were the abuses of indulgences? Was it that the faithful attached an inordinate and wholly superstitious value to them? Quite possibly, though it would not be so easy to prove this. Was it that unscrupulous men turned them to their own ends and endeavored to reap material profit from them? Yes, no one in his senses would deny this. But such abuses in no sense imply that the doctrine is false — as indeed Ullmann himself seems to be uneasily conscious. But the main point is this: Did the Popes endeavor to remove these abuses? Ullmann implies that they did not. Yet what proof has he of this? It must be remembered that those were not the days of quick despatch, of telegrams, etc.; communication was a difficult matter; hence we are not to expect to find a multiplicity of rescripts, Briefs, letters and instructions, for the suppression of abuses; more especially when such abuses were disciplinary and not doctrinal. And this is the point to be insisted on. For the Church was perfectly well aware that the doctrine was abused by unscrupulous men — as indeed what doctrine does not fail to be abused at one time or another in the Church's history?

But, while aware of the abuse, this never led the Church to doubt about the doctrine. Such a notion is of course unthinkable when it is question of a divinely-established Church

with a divinely-bestowed teaching power; if She could doubt She would cease to be the Church of Christ, or rather She would never have been so. But was the abuse so grave as is often supposed? We very much question it. For, after all, that some, many if you like, tried to make money out of the incredulity of the uninstructed is no unheard-of thing: *It must needs be that scandals come. But woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!* Now no historian will deny the existence of grave scandals in the Church in the later Middle Ages; if he is a wise man he will see in the Black Death with all its awful consequences the most fruitful cause of such scandals. He will also say that save for these scandals such men as Luther would never have revolted. But a wise student of history will never be led to maintain that Luther's view of the case was the only one; nor will he exaggerate the causes which may be assigned for Luther's defection. And is it true that the question of the abuse of indulgences played so large a part in Luther's revolt? He certainly said very strong things about indulgences. But then he said strong things about everything! The only way to answer this question is to examine the Acts of the Council of Trent. Now three points stand out in startling clearness as we peruse the *Acta* or *Diaria* of this great reforming Council. The first is that the question of the validity or expediency of indulgences never occurred to the minds of the Fathers or theologians of the Council. Thus in the Bull *Universis* published by Paul III. on February 10, 1545, a plenary indulgence is granted to all who — 'provided they be truly contrite and have confessed their sins' — attend at the opening of the Council.¹ The same Pontiff conceded to all the Bishops who assisted at the Council

¹ See Concilium Tridentinum, Diariorum, Actorum, etc., *Collectio*, ed. Societas Goerresiana, Tom. IV. 391.

the power of granting a plenary indulgence to their flocks on their return from the Council.¹

It is worth noting that even Luther never denied the licitness of indulgences: *sunt de numero eorum, quae licent, et non de numero eorum, quae expediunt.*² We notice the same in the case of Molinos who was condemned by Innocent XI. in the Decree published on August 28, 1687, and in the Constitution *Coelestis Pastor*, of November 19 in the same year. According to the sixteenth, among the condemned Propositions taken out of his works, he held that:—

“It is unfitting to seek to gain indulgences wherewith to pay the penalties due to one’s own sins. For it is better to satisfy the Divine Justice than to appeal to the Divine Mercy. The former proceeds from pure love of God, the latter from love of our own interest, and cannot be pleasing to God nor meritorious since it means fleeing from the cross.”³

Similar sentiments apparently induced Luther to maintain that, even if gained, indulgences did not avail for the remission of the penalties due to actual sins; or again that they availed only for hardened criminals; that they were of no avail for the dead or the dying, for the sick or legitimately impeded, nor for the innocent, nor for private sinners, nor for those who aim at a better life.⁴

And the second point which emerges is that on the question of the actual nature of indulgences and of their applicability to the souls in Purgatory there was much discussion among the theologians. Thus in the Diary kept by Angelo Massa-

¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 496. This Bull was never published, *ibid.*, 490, *note*. For the indulgence actually granted at the opening of the Council, cf. *ibid.*, 515, and cp. 533, 540.

² Cf. Denzinger, No. 758.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 1236.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Props. XIX., XX., and XXII., amongst the condemned Propositions of Luther, Denzinger, Nos. 759–762.

relli de S. Severino we read that on June 19, 1547, copies were sent in of four difficulties proposed by the Congregation of Minor Theologians regarding Purgatory, and of seven regarding indulgences.¹ Under date, June 22, we are told that these *dubia* were sent to Rome for examination.² Then we find that between the dates June 23 and July 15, there were held no fewer than fourteen sessions of the Minor Theologians for the discussion of the decrees to be drawn up on Purgatory and indulgences. These sessions lasted from 10 A. M. till 1 P. M. or more often till 2 P. M.; large numbers of the Prelates of the Council are mentioned in each instance as attending at the discussions which were presided over by one of the Cardinals.³ And these, be it noted, were only the public and formal discussions of the questions. They imply an immense amount of private labor and preparation. Again, under date, July 23, Massarelli tells us that he himself made excerpts from his notes on indulgences as presented in the Decrees of former Pontiffs (*ex antiquis Pontificibus*).⁴ Nothing could be more instructive than these summary notices of the Sessions held; they show us how these theologians had to toil, and what pains they took; and they show us too how utterly undeserved are the accusations made regarding haste or neglect.

And the third point which stands out is that the question of abuses of indulgences was a very minor one in the minds of the Fathers. For after all, the fact that certain wicked men abused them did not affect the doctrine at stake. Hence the only declaration touching abuses occurs under date, November 28, 1547, where we read that one Archbishop and four Bishops were deputed to collect information touching abuses regarding the Mass, Indulgences, Purgatory, and Monastic

¹ *Diarla*, IV. 665.

² *Ibid.*, 666.

³ *Ibid.*, 666-673.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 675.

vows — “the dogmatic aspect of which points has already been discussed by the Minor Theologians.”¹

We see the outcome of this investigation in the Decree published on December 4, 1563 in Session XXV. :—

“Since the power of conferring indulgences has been conferred upon the Church by Christ, and since the Church has from the very earliest times² made use of this divinely-bestowed power, this Holy Synod teaches and commands that the use of indulgences, most conducive to the salvation of the Christian flock and approved by the authority of the Sacred Councils, is to be retained in the Church. And the same Holy Synod anathematizes those who either maintain that indulgences are of no effect, or deny that the power to grant them has been given to the Church.

“At the same time this Synod desires that these indulgences should be granted with moderation according to the old and approved custom of the Church; lest owing to the Church shewing Herself too easy in this matter discipline should become relaxed.

“But with a view to correcting and amending the abuses which have crept in on this head and which have furnished heretics with an opportunity for uttering blasphemies against the great name of indulgences: We by this present decree declare in the most emphatic terms that all unworthy seeking of alms with a view to gaining indulgences be wholly abolished, for from this cause have sprung many abuses among the Christian peoples.”³

Can the writer of the article we are criticizing now maintain that the Church has not safeguarded the doctrine of indulgences?

“10. Centuries of the practice of indulgences have sufficiently

¹ *Ibid.*, 723.

² For the antiquity of indulgences, note the words of Boniface VIII. in the Bull for the Jubilee year 1300, *Antiquorum habet*: “Trustworthy narratives of old historians tell us that large remissions and indulgences for sins [i.e. for the penalties attaching to forgiven sins] were granted to those who visited the famous Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles in the city [of Rome] . . . these we confirm and approve.” (*Apud* Denzinger, No. 467, ed. 1911.) Cf. also St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, XXV. II., reply to the fourth difficulty, for the indulgences granted to those who visit St. Peter’s.

³ Labbe, XIV. col. 917-918.

demonstrated that, guard the doctrine as carefully as it can be, with subtleties and sophistries of argument, still it inevitably leads the unlettered mind to think that one can in some way slip past the obligation to personal righteousness and evade the requirement 'to cease to do evil and learn to do well.' 'Sound Christian judgment must therefore be given against the whole system of indulgences.'

No one who knows indulgences "from within," i.e., from the practice of them, could ever have penned these words! The writer sees indulgences 'from without'; he has never tried to gain one; what, then, does he know about them in practice? Again, can he furnish us with one single instance of a person so abusing the doctrine? Let him go into any Catholic School and ask the children — those who are old enough to understand — whether they have any such idea of indulgences. Their answers will surprise him!

We must apologize for the length of this paper. Yet it is not we who are to blame! We should like to say one word in conclusion. Christians as a body are talking and thinking much about the re-union of Christendom. May we say that such papers as the one we have been occupied with can never work for that most desirable of all ends? Those who yearn for unity know that — to put it as gently as possible — they have to reckon with the Catholic Church. If instead of trying to prove how wrong She has been they would but endeavor to look at the other side of the picture and see how right She has been, and then endeavor to see whether the numerous points on which She appeals to their admiration — however unwilling — do not throw much light on those points where they fancy She has been wrong, much good would be done and the way would be paved for that Re-union for which we all yearn. Study Her from within, try to see Her as She sees Herself, read Her own books, Her authoritative Decrees.