PARK EAST HIGH SCHOOL
Purpose, Preparation, Pride

AP European History - Mr. Ott

Name: _____ Date: _____

Primary Sources

The Spark for the Reformation: Indulgences

Johann Tetzel

Although there were many causes of the Reformation, the immediate issue that sparked Luther into the position of a reformer was the sale of indulgences. Indulgences were remissions or exemptions for penance in purgatory due to an individual for the sins he had committed in life. They could be granted by the papacy because of the doctrine that it could draw on the treasury of merit or pool of spiritual wealth left by Christ and extraordinarily good Christians over time. As with some other practices of the Church, what was once used primarily for spiritual purposes, such as rewarding acts of penitence, was by the early sixteenth century being "abused" for secular purposes, such as providing money for Church officers. This was apparently the case with the sale of indulgences by Johann Tetzel (c. 1465–1519), a persuasive, popular Dominican friar who was appointed by Archbishop Albert of Mainz in 1517 to sell indulgences in Germany. Proceeds of the sale were to be split between Albert and the papacy. The following is an excerpt from a sermon on indulgences by Tetzel.

CONSIDER: *The most convincing "selling points" made by Tetzel; the requirements for obtaining effective indulgences; how Tetzel might have defended himself against attacks on this sale of indulgences as an abuse.*

You may obtain letters of safe conduct from the vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which you are able to liberate your soul from the hands of the enemy, and convey it by means of contrition and confession, safe and secure from all pains of Purgatory, into the happy kingdom. For know, that in these letters are stamped and engraven all the merits of Christ's passion there laid bare. Consider, that for each and every mortal sin it is necessary to undergo seven years of penitence after confession and contrition, either in this life or in Purgatory.

How many mortal sins are committed in a day, how many in a week, how many in a month, how many in a year, how many in the whole extent of life! They are well-nigh numberless, and those that commit them must needs suffer endless punishment in the burning pains of Purgatory.

But with these confessional letters you will be able at any time in life to obtain full indulgence for all penalties imposed upon you, in all cases except the four reserved to the Apostolic See. Thence throughout your whole life, whenever you wish to make confession, you may receive the same remission, except in cases reserved to the Pope, and afterwards, at the hour of death, a full indulgence as to all penalties and sins, and your share of all spiritual blessings that exist in the church militant and all its members.

Do you not know that when it is necessary for anyone to go to Rome, or undertake any other dangerous journey, he takes his money to a broker and gives a certain per cent—five or six or ten—in order that at Rome or elsewhere he may receive again his funds intact, by means of the letters of this same broker? Are you not willing, then, for the fourth part of a florin, to obtain these letters, by virtue of which you may bring, not your money, but your divine and immortal soul, safe and sound into the land of Paradise?

SOURCE: From James Harvey Robinson and Merrick Whitcomb, eds., "Period of the Early Reformation in Germany," in *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. II, no. 6, ed. Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1898), pp. 4–5.