

Are Indulgences Still Being Sold?



This is from a March 1920 publication of the *Converted Catholic Magazine* which was not found in the Lutheran Library. It's been 104 years since then and I wondered if indulgences are still being sold today in 2024. Here's what I found:

The Catholic Church does not now nor has it ever approved the sale of indulgences. This is to be distinguished from the undeniable fact that individual Catholics (perhaps the best known of them being the German Dominican Johann Tetzel [1465-1519]) did sell indulgences—but in doing so they acted contrary to explicit Church regulations. This practice is utterly opposed to the Catholic Church's teaching on indulgences, and it cannot be regarded as a teaching or practice of the Church. — Source:

<https://www.catholic.com/qa/does-the-catholic-church-still-sell-indulgences>

This is certainly false information from a Catholic source! Those statements are contrary to what I know from reliable sources, insiders, former priests on the subject!

Many people assume that the Catholic Church stopped granting indulgences after Luther's famous rejection of them. Indeed, nearly 50 years later, Pope Pius V put a stop to their sale. However, Pius V also affirmed the validity of indulgences themselves so long as no money was exchanged. — Source:

<https://theconversation.com/the-catholic-view-on-indulgences-and-how-they-work-today-193066>

This sounds closer to the truth, but it still contradicts the article below what a former Catholic priest, Joseph McCabe, wrote in his article. He says "And indulgences are sold by the million all over Spain today (1920), under the direct and annual authority of the Vatican!" Let's search the Internet a bit more. Here's something that was written as late as 2016:

Those of us who know our liturgical calendars are reminded that November is specially devoted to the souls in purgatory—where all the souls whose sins are forgiven but who have not fully remitted the attaching temporal penalty receive a final purification before entering heaven. This is a fitting time for us to re-introduce ourselves to the tradition of indulgences—not only for our own benefit but **also for the building up of the Church's treasury.** –

Source:

<https://catholicexchange.com/church-still-believes-indulgences/>

LOL! "...the building up of the Church's treasury" means an exchange of *MONEY*! This was written only 8 years ago by Stephen Beale who says he was raised as an evangelical Protestant and converted to Catholicism. That's sad. Any Protestant who converts to Catholicism is a person who does not know the Bible or a person who takes the authority of institution with a corrupt history over the authority of the Bible.

I think it's quite possible the sale of indulgences is being done covertly today in the confessional box. The priest tells the confessor to give a certain amount of money to the Church, and he or she gets a certain amount of years less of suffering in Purgatory. Nothing said in the confessional box goes out of the confessional box. I went 8 years to a Catholic school in Chicago. The concept of obtaining indulgences to shorten my time in Purgatory was taught to me by Catholic nuns.

This is very interesting history for me about the Catholic Church in Spain and Italy. I hope you appreciate it too.

Are Indulgences Still Being Sold?

By Joseph McCabe, formerly the very Rev. Father Antony, of the Franciscan Order.

Nearly 400 years ago a rebellious monk set Europe aflame with revolt against the authority of Rome. Corrupt, sensual, skeptical, laughing at its own devices, the Court of Rome ruled a densely ignorant world with a levity born of ten centuries of secure domination. The world was growing, however, and the sonorous appeal of Luther brought it to a sudden manhood.

As is well known, one of the historic abuses that fired the indignation of Luther was the sale of indulgences. Scornfully he tossed aside the priestly casuistry that would represent the transaction as no "sale," but the "giving" of a spiritual favor—in return for a sum of money.

Half of Europe followed the Saxon monk. But for the armies of Spain and Austria the Papacy would probably been erased from the map of Europe 200 years ago. Sell indulgences! Protestants look back with amazement on the Papal audacity, and take it as a measure of the dense ignorance of the Middle Ages that even the attempt should be made. It is a test of medieval conditions, a plumbing of the depths of ignorance. And indulgences are sold by the million all over Spain today (1920), under the direct and annual

authority of the Vatican!

Indulgences Still Being Sold.

The sale of indulgences is so historic a symbol of Papal corruption that I can not do other than take it as the first point in my indictment of the Spanish Church. I refused to believe the fact when it was first brought to my notice, long after I had quitted the Catholic ministry. My informant, an American gentleman who had lived in Spain for more than ten years, forwarded to me copies of these "*bulas*," as they are called, and the truth was evident. I have since made full inquiries, written on the subject, been "answered" by an English Jesuit—who explained that the indulgence was **a pure gift from the Church, in return for a specific sum of money**, much as (he did not say this) your soap or your butter is and have lost all doubt on the subject.

On the windows of Catholic bookshops in Spain one often sees the words "Bulas" (the Spanish word for indulgences) in large type. You enter and ask for a "bula"—or you may go to the nearest priest's house for one—and find that there are four species, at two different prices. Lay a peseta on the counter, and demand the ordinary "bula de la Santa Cruzada." A flimsy piece of paper, much sealed and impressed, about a foot square, and with the signature of the Archbishop of Toledo, is handed to you, with your change of twenty-five centimos. You have not bought it. You gave an "alms" of seventy-five centimos (about ten cents) to the Church (minus the shopman's commission), and the Church graciously accorded you—but it would occupy too much of my space even to enumerate the extraordinary spiritual privileges which you can purchase for ten cents in that favored land. The central grace is a "plenary indulgence."

The Passion for Pelf.

pelf /pělf/
noun

1. Wealth or riches, especially when dishonestly acquired.
2. Money; riches; lucre; gain; — generally conveying the idea of something ill-gotten or worthless. It has no plural.

Catholic theology teaches that there are two alternatives to Heaven, two unfathomable pits of fire—Hell and Purgatory. If you die in serious, un-absolved sin, you go to Hell; but few Catholics ever think of going there. It is so easy to get one's self drafted into the second department. But the second department, Purgatory, is exceedingly unpleasant; the fire and other horrors are the same; the duration is uncertain. Here, again, however, the Church comes to the rescue. Confession and sorrow have relieved you of the first danger; something may be done to avoid the second. In earlier and harder times one went on the Crusades to achieve this. Some Spaniards offered the Papacy money instead, and received the comforting assurance that the Purgatory debt was canceled (a "plenary indulgence"). The sum has sunk with the course of centuries, and now in Spain you gain this gorgeous assurance, with a dozen others, for an "alms" of a dime! But attempt to give your alms to the poor, and you get no bula.

That is the common bula of Spanish church life. The rich, of course, pay more than the small sum stated on the paper; and as the ignorant peasants find frequent need of this comforting assurance, since it only lasts until they sin again, the amount that the church derives annually from this sordid source of revenue can be imagined. Another bula, of the same price, gives you the same comforting assurance in regard to any deceased friend to whom you may wish to apply it. Since, however, it is never quite sure that your "disposition" came up to the required altitude, you do well to continue buying and trying. A third bula is even cheaper, yet more substantial in its advantages. For fifty centimos (less than ten cents) you obtain permission to eat meat on Fridays and most of the days on which Catholics in less favored countries must not eat meat. Unfortunately, you find that the bula is invalid unless you buy the other bula as well; but twenty or twenty-five cents is fairly cheap for a year's permission to disregard the fast-days.

The Conniving "Composition."

The fourth bula is the most infamous, unless the reader chooses to regard it with humor. Technically, it is known as the "composition"—an excellent word. It says that if you have any stolen property of which you can not discover the rightful owner; the purchase of this bula makes the property yours. The pickpocket does not usually know the address of his victim; and though the bula declares that the theft must not be committed in view of the bula, the practised conscience of a Spanish thief easily negotiates that difficulty. But this is not the full enormity or the full justification of the title "composition." One bula costs about twenty-five cents, and covers three dollars' worth of ill-gotten goods. For every additional three dollars' worth you have stolen you must give twenty-five cents to the Church—in other words, take out a fresh bula. And—let me quote the incredible words of the document—"in the event of the sum due exceeding seven hundred thirty five pesetas fifty centimos (one hundred twenty-five dollars), the amount compoundable by fifty Summaries, application must be made to Us for a fitting solution of the case!" The priest will take his tithe of your knavery on a scale he thinks fit to determine.

The Finger of the Pope.

Let it be clearly understood that I am not reproducing the statements of writers, travelers or residents; I am describing, or translating, the very words of the bulas, copies of which lie before me. Incredible as the facts will seem to most readers, there is only one quibble which the zealous Catholic, in his misguided wish to defend the Spanish Church, can raise: he will demur at the phrases "bought" and "sold." I may safely leave that question of casuistry to the reader. From this appalling traffic the Spanish Church draws millions upon millions of pesetas every year—from the rich, who thus pay for its political support, and from the densely ignorant peasantry, whose hardwon centimos are stolen by this abominable chicanery.

English Roman Catholics who heard of the traffic for the first time, innocently drew the attention of the Vatican to it, and were, after repeated letters, snubbed for their intrusion. The truth is that the whole traffic is

under the control of the Vatican. These bulas are no bits of medieval parchment that have lingered into the dawn of the Twentieth Century; they are printed afresh every year, and they can not be issued until an annual permission comes from Rome. Then a procession of heralds marches through the streets of Madrid announcing the glad news that Spain's unique privilege has been renewed. What a spectacle! Through streets equipped with the latest achievements of modern science **there still marches the medieval troop, crying in the ears of educated Madrid that Spain still lives in the Fifteenth Century.** I have only to add that until Eighteen Hundred Seventy the Vatican openly took a percentage on this sordid traffic. In these days of inquisitive American and English converts we do not know what the understanding is between the Papacy and the Archbishop of Toledo, who issues and seals those symbols of the Spanish Church's degradation.

Holy Beggars.

From the sale of indulgences I pass to other features of Spanish Church life which are hardly less repellent. One of the most offensive practices that the traveler notices in modern Spain is the persistent begging. There are more than ninety one thousand beggars in Spain, and they regard themselves as practicing a profession which has the peculiar sanction of the Church. A resident in Spain informed me that he was boldly accosted for alms by a man whom he knew to have a flourishing market-garden near his own residence. Mrs. Bates, in her *"Spanish Highways and Byways,"* tells a story of a German lady who was accosted by a beggar. With modern feeling she explained to him that she would do something more pleasant than give him alms; she would give him an opportunity to earn the money. He drew his cloak about him with the dignity of a hidalgo (a member of the Spanish or Portuguese nobility), as he replied, "Madam, I am a beggar, not a laborer." The Church is directly responsible for this tribe of repulsive idlers. Her edifices are thrown open periodically that pious ladies may distribute bread, wine and cigarettes to the sitting crowd of professional beggars.

Catholicism and Education.

Far heavier, however, is the guilt of the clergy in regard to **the atrocious proportion of illiterates in Spain.** We are urged to regard the Catholic Church as the great founder of schools, the educator of Europe. The claim is easily tested. There are still two parts of Europe where her power is practically unbroken—Spain and Southern Italy. In **Spain the proportion of illiterates is sixty-eight per cent.,** and in Southern Italy—in Calabria—it is seventy-nine per cent of the population.

Under Liberal pressure, a law of compulsory education was passed in Spain. By Eighteen Hundred Seventy-seven, four millions out of sixteen millions could read and write, and in the subsequent thirty years the ratio has only risen to six millions in eighteen and one-half million people. The teacher is awarded a salary of about a hundred dollars a year, so that the character of such instruction as is given may easily be conjectured. But the State will not even provide this sum, and schoolmasters are thrown on the voluntary donations of parents. The result is that the vast majority of the children

get no instructions, and the schoolmaster is the butt of Spanish wit. The Madrid papers gave a case in Nineteen Hundred Three of a master who canvassed a district to find how many parents would contribute if he opened a school. Three families in one hundred promised to contribute. In another place, not far from Madrid, the alcalde (the traditional Spanish municipal magistrate) endeavored to enforce the law, which is universally disregarded, that there should be no bullfights where the master's salary was not paid. The infuriated people drove the teacher to the plaza and there baited him. Thousands of children in Madrid itself have no school accommodation.

The Blessing of Illiteracy.

For this state of uncivilization **the guilt must be equally divided between the Church and the State. Neither wishes to see the people educated.** In one important respect, however, the Church has the greater guilt. Poor the State is, undoubtedly, though no sane social student will fail to see how profitably a large part of its expenditure would be diverted to education. But **the Church is wealthy, immensely wealthy.** The vast revenue already mentioned, together with all parochial dues and collection, goes to the secular (or parochial) clergy, in whose larger churches and cathedrals immense treasure has accumulated. While the workers in parts of Spain must labor for about five pesetas (ninety cents) a week, and while despairing schoolmasters must set their hands to whatever incongruous employment they can discover to augment their fifty to a hundred dollars a year for teaching in barn-like structures, the wealthier churches house incalculable treasure, and the clergy usually live in great comfort. The wardrobe of the image of the Virgin at Toledo would alone suffice to build hundreds of fine schools. "One robe bears," says Mrs. Bates, "eighty-five thousand large pearls, and as many sapphires, amethysts and diamonds." The crown used to decorate the statue is worth twenty-five thousand dollars, and the bracelets ten thousand dollars. The total value of this useless and senseless jewelry in the great churches of Spain is beyond calculation; and the country is too poor to educate more than a part of its children, and that with ridiculous inadequacy. Cordova alone has six hundred priests to fifty-five thousand people; and Cordova is on the verge of bankruptcy.

"Blind Mouths."

But this overwhelming sufficiency of parochial clergy, with its incalculable wealth, is not the chief source of offense to enlightened Spaniards. A vast population of monks and nuns and Jesuits, who do no parochial work, is spread over the land, and amasses wealth with even greater success than the secular clergy. In the heated conflicts of the two bodies the truth is suffered to leak out. A Spanish prelate, Monsignor Jose Veleza de Gunjado, has recently declared that these regulars (monks and nuns) own two-thirds of the money of the country and one-third of the wealth in property, etc. While they flaunt vows of poverty before the ignorant peasantry, they draw out of the healthy circulation of the impoverished country a colossal proportion of its resources. A "religious review (the "Revista Christiana") gave the income of the Jesuit body at Manresa alone as more than seventy-five thousand dollars a year, and this is only one among a thousand instances of an immensely wealthy

community. **Before the Phillippine Islands were taken from Spain, the Church drew one hundred thirteen million pesetas a year from the Islands** (Note: To this day, the Philippines is still a developing country with mostly bad roads), the State being content with a further sixty-six millions. Barcelona had one hundred sixty-five convents until the recent riots, many of them worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Province of Catalonia supported two thousand three hundred of these institutions.

Popery and Decency.

Nor must the reader be misled by audacious Catholic assurances that these wealthy communities represent the voluntary piety of the faithful, and are holy retreats to which the timid may retire from "the world." Even in this country the Catholic clergy generally—I am not speaking at random: I have been a priest and a monk—disdain and detest the communities of monks. The idleness and petty hypocrisy to which their ascetic professions lead is fully described in my *"Twelve Years in a Monastery."* As I had the further advantage of living in monasteries in a "Catholic" country (Belgium), I obtained some idea of the real nature of such institutions under more or less normal conditions. The appalling laziness of the vast majority, the gross ignorance which masquerades as humility, the enormous consumption of alcohol behind closed doors, the all-pervading hypocrisy and very widespread immorality, would if they were fully appreciated by the educated laity of Belgium, turn the smoldering anti-clericalism into a fierce blaze of anger. Not one monk in twenty merited respect, even in his superstitions. The great majority were grossly sensual, lazy and hypocritical. But even in Belgium there is a large body of critical observers, and the monasteries of Spain have the same corruption in a far greater degree.

A Salacious Clergy.

salacious /sə-lā'shəs/
adjective

1. Appealing to or stimulating sexual desire.

The gross animality (characteristics or nature of an animal) of the monks, the unscrupulousness of the Jesuits—for the Jesuit in Spain is a Jesuit—and the widespread immorality of the clergy are well known to Spaniards. Any who imagine that the charge of flagrant immorality against the Spanish clergy is a Protestant or Rationalist calumny should read *"The Priest and the People in Spain,"* written by an Irish Roman Catholic, Mr. Doran, who wisely chooses to disassociate his co-religionists severely and emphatically from the Roman Catholicism of Spain. "I can remember the time," he says, "when I would have dropped the acquaintance of my best friend had he but said, or hinted, half the things I now know to be true in regard to the condition of the Church in Spain." He states that on one occasion, when he was dining with a number of Spanish priests, he remarked, "without giving the least offense," that "if some of them ventured to say Mass in Ireland, they would be dragged off the altar." They replied, genially, that they always confessed to a companion before Mass. He found a state of immorality among the clergy "which it takes an Irishman half a lifetime to understand and an eternity to forgive." The

sister of the gentleman at whose house he was staying was the mistress of a priest. He adds that the Spanish clergy will marry uncles to nieces readily, "given a sufficient amount of money," and that "nine Spaniards out of ten will tell you that the desire to earn an easy living is the motive which induces so many to join the clergy."

A Trained Hierarchy.

After this Catholic testimony I need not linger over the morality of the Spanish clergy. As an ex-priest I have always refused to create prejudice against my late co-religionists by discussing this side of their affairs; but when, in their corrupt interests, a body of priests like those of the Spanish Church egg on the civic or military officials to murder, it is time to speak. There is immorality enough even among the priests of this country. Sordid cases came to my personal knowledge. In Belgium the condition—a condition that any candid person will expect from their enforced celibacy and good living—is far worse. In Spain and the South of Italy it is flagrant, nor is it confined to the lower clergy and the monks. A writer in the "*Church Quarterly*" relates how an Italian prelate calmly discussed with him the fact, which he neither resented nor denied, that one of the candidates for the papal throne, one of the most distinguished cardinals in the Church, was a man of "conspicuous immorality." The cardinal in question, whose life was described to me in Rome, kept a mistress in a villa not many miles from the Vatican. The hypocrisy that asks English people to shudder over the very intelligible and quite open conduct of Ferrer, whom the Church of Spain prevented from marrying when he wished, and cheerfully acquiesces in this sordid condition of the clergy wherever the mass of the people are still Catholic, is too revolting to characterize.

"Free Unions."

It must not be imagined, however, that this condition of the clergy in Spain is one of the popular charges against them. For many centuries, in the Latin countries, the clergy have withheld their strictures on the conduct of their followers, and the greatest laxity prevails. In Seville, a town renowned for its Catholicism, a French Catholic writer, M. Bazin, was told by a priest that more than half the unions of men and women were "free unions." While the Church parades before the world its high ideal of chastity, and speaks hypocritically of the growth of immorality in the wake of heresy, it is precisely in those regions where it retains enormous power today, and has held absolute sway for ages, that we find the most immoral parts of Europe. Northern Italy, predominant in rebellion against the Church, has a ratio of illegitimate births of only six percent; the Roman province has a ratio of twenty percent, and the Southern provinces much the same. It is a foolish superstition, encouraged by Catholics, that the laxity of the Latin races is a matter of temperature. The Northern races were just as bad before the Reformation. That notorious laxity is due solely to the fact that an immoral clergy never dared to press on the people their theoretic gospel of chastity.

Enlightened Spaniards Are Bitter.

But if the bulk of the Spaniards smile at the immorality of their priests, those more enlightened Spaniards who see the lifeblood of their country being drained to sustain such a system feel a pardonable bitterness. Let me give one detail by which one may measure the whole monstrosity. Diercks relates that the "*Revista Christiana*" at one time made a calculation of the value of the wax and incense burned in Spanish churches in the course of a year. The total reached the extraordinary sum of seven million five hundred thousand dollars—a sum little short of what Spain spends on education! And this is one small item of the total cost to the country of its religious system. Add to this the millions obtained in the ordinary way of fees and collections, the millions received for bulas, the millions charged (on one pretext or another) for scapulars, rosaries, bullet-proof prayers, agnus-deis, and the whole medieval magazine of charms, the millions received for obtaining dispensations to marry, for baptisms, funerals, masses (each of which costs from two to twenty pesetas), and other ceremonies, the millions acquired by wills, by taking over the goods of monastic aspirants, and in other ways. And the whole of this vast proportion of an impoverished circulation goes to feed the parasitic growth, with no spiritual vitality or social usefulness, which I have described.

Let the light fall upon the mind of Spain, and this decrepit and corrupt agglomeration of medieval vices and abuses will be swept ruthlessly away. Rebellion against the Vatican has followed immediately upon the extension of popular enlightenment in France, in Northern Italy, and in those South American republics which have dared to educate. Beyond all question, it is following the same course in Spain.

Will this effete and corrupt body, with all its dependent industries, contemplate impartially the spread of education in Spain? Will that colossal revenue from bulas and other medieval barbarities continue when Spain is Europeanized—to use the phrase of its own social students?

How Can These Things Be?

But if Spain is so largely anti-clerical, how comes the Church to retain the power it does? Spain is seething with anti-clericalism. Mr. Isaacson, in his "*Rome in Many Lands*," quotes an orthodox Spanish paper, "*El Correo Espanol*," to the effect that only one million five hundred thousand men and three million five hundred thousand women, in a population of eighteen million five hundred thousand, now obey the clergy in Spain. I have dealt thoroughly with the question in my "*Decay of the Church of Rome*." If that be so, how can we explain the power of the Church?

Here we come to another and not less sordid aspect of Spanish life, which it is absolutely necessary to understand if we wish to understand the murder of Ferrer. **The political system is not less corrupt than the clerical, and the two corruptions support each other** with despairing unscrupulousness. Many who are willing to admit the corruption of the Church will hesitate here, but it is a platitude of recent Spanish literature, and in fact is so well recognized by responsible Spanish statesmen as to make one wonder why any

representative government treats the Spanish Government as a civilized Power.

This is the opportunity of the clergy. Driven from other lands, they make their last stand in Spain. From France, from Portugal, from Cuba, from the Philippines, they have concentrated on the land where only a few millions can read and write, and the political power is manipulated by a system as corrupt as their own. Within a few years, probably, they will be reinforced by the exiled monks of Italy. So long as Spain is ignorant, or only taught a smattering of letters and a vast amount of terrifying superstition in their own schools, they are safe. But they can not wholly shut out the light from France and England, and they play a desperate game. Jesuitry is Jesuitry in Spain. From the boudoir of the Queenmother, and now, I am informed, from the boudoir of the Queen, whom they have won, they rule Spain and swoop down with ferocity on all eruptions of revolt.