REFORMATION 95 Theses Assignment

Student Name: Date:

**Background:** Power Point Lecture: The Reformation Begins; Grasp of Temptation Source Analysis; Tetzel Sells Indulgences Source Analysis; Luther on Indulgences Source Analysis Source Analysis (all are available on [www.oppieap.weebly.com](http://www.oppieap.weebly.com))

**Step One:** In small groups or on your own - read the primary document: Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences Commonly Known as The 95 Theses by Dr. Martin Luther

**Step Two:** Read the secondary document: **The 95 Theses - a modern translation**

**Step Three:** Create a List of FIVE Criteria for selecting and ranking the Theses (or arguments) that most challenged the Roman Catholic Church doctrine of the time.

**Step Four:** Chose the FIVE most significant theses that meet your criteria and rank the Theses from most challenging to least challenging.

**Step Five:** Be prepared to defend your selections orally in class.

Criteria

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Significant Theses – Ranking and Defense of Selection

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| Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences Commonly Known as The 95 Theses by Dr. Martin Luther |
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ut of love and concern for the truth, and with the object of eliciting it, the following heads will be the subject of a public discussion at Wittenberg under the presidency of the reverend father, Martin Luther, Augustinian, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, and duly appointed Lecturer on these subjects in that place. He requests that whoever cannot be present personally to debate the matter orally will do so in absence in writing.

1. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. The word cannot be properly understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, i.e. confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet its meaning is not restricted to repentance in one's heart; for such repentance is null unless it produces outward signs in various mortifications of the flesh.
4. As long as hatred of self abides (i.e. true inward repentance) the penalty of sin abides, viz., until we enter the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope has neither the will nor the power to remit any penalties beyond those imposed either at his own discretion or by canon law.
6. The pope himself cannot remit guilt, but only declare and confirm that it has been remitted by God; or, at most, he can remit it in cases reserved to his discretion. Except for these cases, the guilt remains untouched.
7. God never remits guilt to anyone without, at the same time, making him humbly submissive to the priest, His representative.
8. The penitential canons apply only to men who are still alive, and, according to the canons themselves, none applies to the dead.
9. Accordingly, the Holy Spirit, acting in the person of the pope, manifests grace to us, by the fact that the papal regulations always cease to apply at death, or in any hard case.
10. It is a wrongful act, due to ignorance, when priests retain the canonical penalties on the dead in purgatory.
11. When canonical penalties were changed and made to apply to purgatory, surely it would seem that tares were sown while the bishops were asleep.
12. In former days, the canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution was pronounced; and were intended to be tests of true contrition.
13. Death puts an end to all the claims of the Church; even the dying are already dead to the canon laws, and are no longer bound by them.
14. Defective piety or love in a dying person is necessarily accompanied by great fear, which is greatest where the piety or love is least.
15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, whatever else might be said, to constitute the pain of purgatory, since it approaches very closely to the horror of despair.
16. There seems to be the same difference between hell, purgatory, and heaven as between despair, uncertainty, and assurance.
17. Of a truth, the pains of souls in purgatory ought to be abated, and charity ought to be proportionately increased.
18. Moreover, it does not seem proved, on any grounds of reason or Scripture, that these souls are outside the state of merit, or unable to grow in grace.
19. Nor does it seem proved to be always the case that they are certain and assured of salvation, even if we are very certain ourselves.
20. Therefore the pope, in speaking of the plenary remission of all penalties, does not mean "all" in the strict sense, but only those imposed by himself.
21. Hence those who preach indulgences are in error when they say that a man is absolved and saved from every penalty by the pope's indulgences.
22. Indeed, he cannot remit to souls in purgatory any penalty which canon law declares should be suffered in the present life.
23. If plenary remission could be granted to anyone at all, it would be only in the cases of the most perfect, i.e. to very few.
24. It must therefore be the case that the major part of the people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of relief from penalty.
25. The same power as the pope exercises in general over purgatory is exercised in particular by every single bishop in his bishopric and priest in his parish.
26. The pope does excellently when he grants remission to the souls in purgatory on account of intercessions made on their behalf, and not by the power of the keys (which he cannot exercise for them).
27. There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of the purgatory immediately the money clinks in the bottom of the chest.
28. It is certainly possible that when the money clinks in the bottom of the chest avarice and greed increase; but when the church offers intercession, all depends in the will of God.
29. Who knows whether all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed in view of what is said of St. Severinus and St. Pascal? (Note: Paschal I, pope 817-24. The legend is that he and Severinus were willing to endure the pains of purgatory for the benefit of the faithful).
30. No one is sure of the reality of his own contrition, much less of receiving plenary forgiveness.
31. One who bona fide buys indulgence is a rare as a bona fide penitent man, i.e. very rare indeed.
32. All those who believe themselves certain of their own salvation by means of letters of indulgence, will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.
33. We should be most carefully on our guard against those who say that the papal indulgences are an inestimable divine gift, and that a man is reconciled to God by them.
34. For the grace conveyed by these indulgences relates simply to the penalties of the sacramental "satisfactions" decreed merely by man.
35. It is not in accordance with Christian doctrines to preach and teach that those who buy off souls, or purchase confessional licenses, have no need to repent of their own sins.
36. Any Christian whatsoever, who is truly repentant, enjoys plenary remission from penalty and guilt, and this is given him without letters of indulgence.
37. Any true Christian whatsoever, living or dead, participates in all the benefits of Christ and the Church; and this participation is granted to him by God without letters of indulgence.
38. Yet the pope's remission and dispensation are in no way to be despised, for, as already said, they proclaim the divine remission.
39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, to extol to the people the great bounty contained in the indulgences, while, at the same time, praising contrition as a virtue.
40. A truly contrite sinner seeks out, and loves to pay, the penalties of his sins; whereas the very multitude of indulgences dulls men's consciences, and tends to make them hate the penalties.
41. Papal indulgences should only be preached with caution, lest people gain a wrong understanding, and think that they are preferable to other good works: those of love.
42. Christians should be taught that the pope does not at all intend that the purchase of indulgences should be understood as at all comparable with the works of mercy.
43. Christians should be taught that one who gives to the poor, or lends to the needy, does a better action than if he purchases indulgences.
44. Because, by works of love, love grows and a man becomes a better man; whereas, by indulgences, he does not become a better man, but only escapes certain penalties.
45. Christians should be taught that he who sees a needy person, but passes him by although he gives money for indulgences, gains no benefit from the pope's pardon, but only incurs the wrath of God.
46. Christians should be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they are bound to retain what is only necessary for the upkeep of their home, and should in no way squander it on indulgences.
47. Christians should be taught that they purchase indulgences voluntarily, and are not under obligation to do so.
48. Christians should be taught that, in granting indulgences, the pope has more need, and more desire, for devout prayer on his own behalf than for ready money.
49. Christians should be taught that the pope's indulgences are useful only if one does not rely on them, but most harmful if one loses the fear of God through them.
50. Christians should be taught that, if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence-preachers, he would rather the church of St. Peter were reduced to ashes than be built with the skin, flesh, and bones of the sheep.
51. Christians should be taught that the pope would be willing, as he ought if necessity should arise, to sell the church of St. Peter, and give, too, his own money to many of those from whom the pardon-merchants conjure money.
52. It is vain to rely on salvation by letters of indulgence, even if the commissary, or indeed the pope himself, were to pledge his own soul for their validity.
53. Those are enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid the word of God to be preached at all in some churches, in order that indulgences may be preached in others.
54. The word of God suffers injury if, in the same sermon, an equal or longer time is devoted to indulgences than to that word.
55. The pope cannot help taking the view that if indulgences (very small matters) are celebrated by one bell, one pageant, or one ceremony, the gospel (a very great matter) should be preached to the accompaniment of a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
56. The treasures of the church, out of which the pope dispenses indulgences, are not sufficiently spoken of or known among the people of Christ.
57. That these treasures are not temporal are clear from the fact that many of the merchants do not grant them freely, but only collect them.
58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints, because, even apart from the pope, these merits are always working grace in the inner man, and working the cross, death, and hell in the outer man.
59. St. Laurence said that the poor were the treasures of the church, but he used the term in accordance with the custom of his own time.
60. We do not speak rashly in saying that the treasures of the church are the keys of the church, and are bestowed by the merits of Christ.
61. For it is clear that the power of the pope suffices, by itself, for the remission of penalties and reserved cases.
62. The true treasure of the church is the Holy gospel of the glory and the grace of God.
63. It is right to regard this treasure as most odious, for it makes the first to be the last.
64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is most acceptable, for it makes the last to be the first.
65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets which, in former times, they used to fish for men of wealth.
66. The treasures of the indulgences are the nets which to-day they use to fish for the wealth of men.
67. The indulgences, which the merchants extol as the greatest of favours, are seen to be, in fact, a favourite means for money-getting.
68. Nevertheless, they are not to be compared with the grace of God and the compassion shown in the Cross.
69. Bishops and curates, in duty bound, must receive the commissaries of the papal indulgences with all reverence.
70. But they are under a much greater obligation to watch closely and attend carefully lest these men preach their own fancies instead of what the pope commissioned.
71. Let him be anathema and accursed who denies the apostolic character of the indulgences.
72. On the other hand, let him be blessed who is on his guard against the wantonness and license of the pardon-merchant's words.
73. In the same way, the pope rightly excommunicates those who make any plans to the detriment of the trade in indulgences.
74. It is much more in keeping with his views to excommunicate those who use the pretext of indulgences to plot anything to the detriment of holy love and truth.
75. It is foolish to think that papal indulgences have so much power that they can absolve a man even if he has done the impossible and violated the mother of God.
76. We assert the contrary, and say that the pope's pardons are not able to remove the least venial of sins as far as their guilt is concerned.
77. When it is said that not even St. Peter, if he were now pope, could grant a greater grace, it is blasphemy against St. Peter and the pope.
78. We assert the contrary, and say that he, and any pope whatever, possesses greater graces, viz., the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc., as is declared in I Corinthians 12 [:28].
79. It is blasphemy to say that the insignia of the cross with the papal arms are of equal value to the cross on which Christ died.
80. The bishops, curates, and theologians, who permit assertions of that kind to be made to the people without let or hindrance, will have to answer for it.
81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult for learned men to guard the respect due to the pope against false accusations, or at least from the keen criticisms of the laity.
82. They ask, e.g.: Why does not the pope liberate everyone from purgatory for the sake of love (a most holy thing) and because of the supreme necessity of their souls? This would be morally the best of all reasons. Meanwhile he redeems innumerable souls for money, a most perishable thing, with which to build St. Peter's church, a very minor purpose.
83. Again: Why should funeral and anniversary masses for the dead continue to be said? And why does not the pope repay, or permit to be repaid, the benefactions instituted for these purposes, since it is wrong to pray for those souls who are now redeemed?
84. Again: Surely this is a new sort of compassion, on the part of God and the pope, when an impious man, an enemy of God, is allowed to pay money to redeem a devout soul, a friend of God; while yet that devout and beloved soul is not allowed to be redeemed without payment, for love's sake, and just because of its need of redemption.
85. Again: Why are the penitential canon laws, which in fact, if not in practice, have long been obsolete and dead in themselves,—why are they, to-day, still used in imposing fines in money, through the granting of indulgences, as if all the penitential canons were fully operative?
86. Again: since the pope's income to-day is larger than that of the wealthiest of wealthy men, why does he not build this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of indigent believers?
87. Again: What does the pope remit or dispense to people who, by their perfect repentance, have a right to plenary remission or dispensation?
88. Again: Surely a greater good could be done to the church if the pope were to bestow these remissions and dispensations, not once, as now, but a hundred times a day, for the benefit of any believer whatever.
89. What the pope seeks by indulgences is not money, but rather the salvation of souls; why then does he suspend the letters and indulgences formerly conceded, and still as efficacious as ever?
90. These questions are serious matters of conscience to the laity. To suppress them by force alone, and not to refute them by giving reasons, is to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies, and to make Christian people unhappy.
91. If therefore, indulgences were preached in accordance with the spirit and mind of the pope, all these difficulties would be easily overcome, and indeed, cease to exist.
92. Away, then, with those prophets who say to Christ's people, "Peace, peace," where in there is no peace.
93. Hail, hail to all those prophets who say to Christ's people, "The cross, the cross," where there is no cross.
94. Christians should be exhorted to be zealous to follow Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hells.
95. And let them thus be more confident of entering heaven through many tribulations rather than through a false assurance of peace.

**The 95 Theses - a modern translation**

1. When Jesus said "repent" he meant that believers should live a whole life repenting

2. Only God can give salvation - not a priest.

3. Inwards penitence must be accompanied with a suitable change in lifestyle.

4. Sin will always remain until we enter Heaven.

5. The pope must act according to canon law.

6. Only God can forgive -the pope can only reassure people that God will do this.

7. A sinner must be humbled in front of his priest before God can forgive him.

8. Canon law applies only to the living not to the dead.

9. However, the Holy Spirit will make exceptions to this when required to do so.

10. The priest must not threaten those dying with the penalty of purgatory.

11. The church through church penalties is producing a ‘human crop of weeds’.

12. In days gone by, church penalties were imposed before release from guilt to show true repentance.

13. When you die all your debts to the church are wiped out and those debts are free from being judged.

14. When someone is dying they might have bad/incorrect thoughts against the church and they will be scared. This fear is enough penalty.

15. This fear is so bad that it is enough to cleanse the soul.

16. Purgatory = Hell. Heaven = Assurance.

17. Souls in Purgatory need to find love - the more love the less their sin.

18. A sinful soul does not have to be always sinful. It can be cleansed.

19. There is no proof that a person is free from sin.

20. Even the pope - who can offer forgiveness - cannot totally forgive sins held within.

21. An indulgence will not save a man.

22. A dead soul cannot be saved by an indulgence.

23. Only a very few sinners can be pardoned. These people would have to be perfect.

24. Therefore most people are being deceived by indulgences.

25. The pope’s power over Purgatory is the same as a priest’s.

26. When the pope intervenes to save an individual, he does so by the will of God.

27. It is nonsense to teach that a dead soul in Purgatory can be saved by money.

28. Money causes greed - only God can save souls.

29. Do we know if the souls in Purgatory want to be saved ?

30. No-one is sure of the reality of his own penitence - no-one can be sure of receiving complete forgiveness.

31. A man who truly buys an indulgence (ie believes it is to be what it is) is as rare as someone who truly repents all sin ie very rare.

32. People who believe that indulgences will let them live in salvation will always be damned - along with those who teach it.

33. Do not believe those who say that a papal indulgence is a wonderful gift which allows salvation.

34. Indulgences only offer Man something which has been agreed to by Man.

35. We should not teach that those who aim to buy salvation do not need to be contrite.

36. A man can be free of sin if he sincerely repents - an indulgence is not needed.

37. Any Christian - dead or alive - can gain the benefit and love of Christ without an indulgence.

38. Do not despise the pope’s forgiveness but his forgiveness is not the most important.

39. The most educated theologians cannot preach about indulgences and real repentance at the same time.

40. A true repenter will be sorry for his sins and happily pay for them. Indulgences trivialise this issue.

41. If a pardon is given it should be given cautiously in case people think it’s more important than doing good works.

42. Christians should be taught that the buying of indulgences does not compare with being forgiven by Christ.

43. A Christian who gives to the poor or lends to those in need is doing better in God’s eyes than one who buys 'forgiveness'.

44. This is because of loving others, love grows and you become a better person. A person buying an indulgence does not become a better person.

45. A person who passes by a beggar but buys an indulgence will gain the anger and disappointment of God.

46. A Christian should buy what is necessary for life not waste money on an indulgence.

47. Christians should be taught that they do not need an indulgence.

48. The pope should have more desire for devout prayer than for ready money.

49. Christians should be taught not to rely on an indulgence. They should never lose their fear of God through them.

50. If a pope knew how much people were being charged for an indulgence - he would prefer to demolish St. Peter’s.

51. The pope should give his own money to replace that which is taken from pardoners.

52. It is vain to rely on an indulgence to forgive your sins.

53. Those who forbid the word of God to be preached and who preach pardons as a norm are enemies of both the pope and Christ.

54. It is blasphemy that the word of God is preached less than that of indulgences.

55. The pope should enforce that the gospel - a very great matter - must be celebrated more than indulgences.

56. The treasure of the church is not sufficiently known about among the followers of Christ.

57. The treasure of the Church are temporal (of this life).

58. Relics are not the relics of Christ, although they may seem to be. They are, in fact, evil in concept.

59. St. Laurence misinterpreted this as the poor gave money to the church for relics and forgiveness.

60. Salvation can be sought for through the church as it has been granted this by Christ.

61. It is clear that the power of the church is adequate, by itself, for the forgiveness of sins.

62. The main treasure of the church should be the Gospels and the grace of God.

63. Indulgences make the most evil seem unjustly good.

64. Therefore evil seems good without penance or forgiveness.

65. The treasured items in the Gospels are the nets used by the workers.

66. Indulgences are used to net an income for the wealthy.

67. It is wrong that merchants praise indulgences.

68. They are the furthest from the grace of God and the piety and love of the cross.

69. Bishops are duty bound to sell indulgences and support them as part of their job.

70. But bishops are under a much greater obligation to prevent men preaching their own dreams.

71. People who deny the pardons of the Apostles will be cursed.

72. Blessed are they who think about being forgiven.

73. The pope is angered at those who claim that pardons are meaningless.

74. He will be even more angry with those who use indulgences to criticise holy love.

75. It is wrong to think that papal pardons have the power to absolve all sin.

76. You should feel guilt after being pardoned. A papal pardon cannot remove guilt.

77. Not even St. Peter could remove guilt.

78. Even so, St. Peter and the pope possess great gifts of grace.

79. It is blasphemy to say that the insignia of the cross is of equal value with the cross of Christ.

80. Bishops who authorise such preaching will have to answer for it.

81. Pardoners make the intelligent appear disrespectful because of the pope’s position.

82. Why doesn’t the pope clean feet for holy love not for money ?

83. Indulgences bought for the dead should be re-paid by the pope.

84. Evil men must not buy their salvation when a poor man, who is a friend of God, cannot.

85. Why are indulgences still bought from the church ?

86. The pope should re-build St. Peter’s with his own money.

87. Why does the pope forgive those who serve against him ?

88. What good would be done to the church if the pope was to forgive hundreds of people each day ?

89. Why are indulgences only issued when the pope sees fit to issue them ?

90. To suppress the above is to expose the church for what it is and to make true Christians unhappy.

91. If the pope had worked as he should (and by example) all the problems stated above would not have existed.

92. All those who say there is no problem must go. Problems must be tackled.

93. Those in the church who claim there is no problem must go.

94. Christians must follow Christ at all cost.

95. Let Christians experience problems if they must - and overcome them - rather than live a false life based on present Catholic teaching.