

# INSTRUCTIONS TO THE SUB-COMMISSIONERS

Cardinal Albert (1490–1545), Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg

1517

...Here follow the four principal graces and privileges which are granted by the apostolic bull, of which each may be obtained without the other. In the matter of these four privileges, preachers shall take pains to commend each to believers with the greatest care and, in so far as in their power lies, to explain the same.

The first grace is the complete remission of all sins; and nothing greater than this can be named, since man who lives in sin and forfeits the favor of God obtains complete remission by these means and once more enjoys God's favor. Moreover, through this remission of sins, the punishment which one is obliged to undergo in Purgatory on account of the affront to the divine Majesty is all remitted and the pains of Purgatory completely blotted out. And although nothing is precious enough to be given in exchange for such a grace—since it is the free gift of God and a grace beyond price—yet in order that Christian believers may be the more easily induced to procure the same, We establish the following rules, to wit:

In the first place, everyone who is contrite in heart and has made oral confession, or at all events has the intention of confessing at a suitable time, shall visit at least the seven churches indicated for this purpose—that is to say, those in which the papal arms are displayed—and in each church shall say devoutly five *Paternosters* and five *Ave Marias* in honor of the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby our salvation is won, or one *Miserere*, which Psalm is particularly well-adapted for obtaining forgiveness of sins.

Sick or otherwise incapacitated persons shall visit with the same devotion and prayers the seven altars which the commissioners and sub-commissioners shall have erected in the church where the cross shall be raised, and on which they shall have affixed the papal arms.

Where, however, persons are found so weak that they cannot conveniently come to such a church, then shall their confessor or penitentiary cause an altar to be brought to a convenient place approved by him. And where such persons visit this place and offer up their prayers near the altar or before it, they shall deserve the indulgence as though they had visited the seven churches.

To those, however, who are upon beds of sickness, the image of a saint may be sent, before or beside which they may offer up a certain number of prayers, according to the judgment of the confessor, in which case they shall be considered to have done as much as if they had visited the seven churches.

But where a certain one, particularly a woman, requests, on account of some special cause, that the visitation of the churches and altars be remitted, the penitentiaries may grant the request on proper grounds; but the said visitation shall be replaced with an increased contribution.

Respecting, now, the contribution to the chest for the building of the said church of the chief of the apostles, the penitentiaries and confessors, after they have explained to those making confession the full remission and privileges, shall ask of them for how much money or other temporal goods they would conscientiously go without for the said most complete remission and privileges; and this shall be done in order that hereafter they may be brought the more easily to contribute. And because the conditions and occupations of men are so manifold and diverse that We cannot consider them individually and impose specific rates accordingly, We have therefore concluded that the rates should be determined according to the recognized classes of persons.

Kings and queens and their offspring, archbishops and bishops, and other great rulers as well, provided they seek the places where the cross is raised or otherwise present themselves, shall pay at least five and twenty Rhenish guilders in gold.

Abbots and the great prelates of cathedral churches, counts, barons, and others of the higher nobility, together with their consorts, shall pay for each letter of indulgence ten such guilders.

Other lesser prelates and nobles, as also the rectors of celebrated places, and all others who, either from permanent incomes or merchandise, or otherwise, enjoy a total yearly revenue of five hundred gold guilders, shall pay six such guilders.

Other citizens and tradesmen and artisans who have individual incomes and families of their own shall pay one such guilder; others of less means only a half.

And where it is impossible to adhere rigidly to the schedule above indicated, then We declare that the said kings, bishops, dukes, abbots, prelates, counts, barons, members of the higher nobility and rectors, together with all others above mentioned, shall place or caused to be placed in the chest a sum in accordance with the dictates of sound reason, proportionate to their magnificence or generosity, after they have listened to the advice and council of the sub-commissioners and penitentiaries and of their confessors, that they may fully obtain the grace and privileges.

All other persons are confided to the discretion of the confessors and penitentiaries, who should have ever in view the advancement of this building, and should urge their penitents to a freer contribution, but should let no one go away without some portion of grace, because the happiness of Christian believers is here concerned not less than the interests of the building. And those that have no money, they shall supply their contribution with prayer and fasting; for the Kingdom of Heaven should be open to the poor not less than to the rich.

And although a married woman may not dispose of the husband's goods against his will, yet she shall be able to contribute in this instance against the will of her husband of her dowry or of her own private property, which has come to her in a regular manner. Where she has no such possessions, or is prevented by her husband, she shall then supply such contribution with prayer; and the same We wish to have understood concerning sons who still remain under parental control.

Where, however, the said poor wives and sons who still remain under parental control may obtain by entreaty or otherwise from other rich and pious persons the means needed for such payments and contributions, they shall place the sums so acquired in the chest. Where, however, they have absolutely no way of procuring such contributions, then they may obtain through prayer and supplication the said treasures of grace as well for themselves as for the dead.

In all the cases above indicated, however, some room shall be left for the exercise of discretion on the part of the sub-commissioners and confessors, who shall have regard to God and their consciences, so that peace of conscience and the welfare of all the above said persons shall be happily secured.

The second signal grace is a confessional letter containing the most extraordinarily comforting and hitherto unheard of privileges, and which also retains its virtue even after Our bull expires at the end of eight years, since the bull says: "they shall be participators now and forever." The meaning of the same preachers and confessors shall explain and bring unto all possible prominence; for there will be granted in the confessional letter to those who buy: first, the power to choose a qualified confessor (even a monk from the mendicant orders) who shall absolve them first and foremost, with the consent of the persons involved, from all censures by whomsoever imposed; in the second place, from each and every crime, even the greatest, and as well from those reserved to the Apostolic See, once in a lifetime and in the hour of death; third, in those cases which are not reserved, as often as necessary; fourth, the chosen confessor may grant him complete forgiveness of all sins once in life, and at the hour of death, as often as it may seem at hand, although death ensue not; and, fifth, transform all kinds of vows, excepting alone those solemnly taken, into other works of piety (as when one has vowed to perform the journey to the Holy Land, or to visit the holy Apostles at Rome, to make a pilgrimage to Saint James at Compostella, to become a monk, or to take a vow of chastity); sixth, the confessor may administer to him the sacrament of the altar at all seasons, except on Easter day, and in the hour of death.

We furthermore ordain that one of these confessional letters shall be given and imparted for the quarter of a Rhenish gold guilder, in order that the poor shall not thereby be shut out from the manifold graces therein contained. It may, however, happen that nobles and other wealthy persons may, out of devotion and liberality, be disposed to give more. Whatever is given over and above the ordinary fee shall be placed in the chest. In cases where such letters are demanded by colleges or cloisters, whether of men or women, the fee which they shall be obliged to pay must be computed by the sub-commissioners according to their number and their property. The same sub-commissioners must seal the confessional letter which shall be issued and sign them with their own hand, setting forth the fee which has been paid for the letter.

It is also Our desire that the name of only one person should be written in the confessional letter, except in case of man and wife, who are one in the flesh. To these may also be added the sons and daughters who are still under parental control and have as yet nothing of their own. And in order that each and every one of the said persons, as well as the poor and those of moderate means, may be able to obtain such confessional letters, We hereby clothe our general sub-commissioner with power to fix a certain sum to be paid collectively by the persons whose names are written in a confessional letter, as it may best subserve the interests of the aforesaid church building.

We desire also, that the names of each and every one who buys a letter, or obtains one for any cause without remuneration shall be written by him who issues the same in a special book. And he that issues shall endorse his name upon each letter, that an account of the sales may be given later and that no mistakes may creep in.

We desire, moreover, that the said confessional letters be issued in all places covered by our commission for the sale of indulgences, even where the cross has not been raised, during the period of eight years, by those who hold authentic written commissions either from Us or from Our general sub-commissioners.

The third most important grace is the participation in all the possessions of the Church universal, which consists herein, that contributors toward the said building, together with their deceased relations who have departed this world in a state of grace, shall from now and for eternity be partakers in all petitions, intercessions, alms, fastings, and prayers in each and every pilgrimage, even those to the Holy Land. Furthermore, in the stations at Rome, in the masses, canonical hours, flagellations, and all other spiritual goods which have been brought forth or which shall be brought forth by the universal, most holy Church militant, or by any of its members. Believers will become participants in all these things who purchase confessional letters. Preachers and confessors must insist with great perseverance upon these advantages, and persuade believers that they should not neglect to acquire these along with their confessional letter.

We also declare that in order to acquire these two most important graces, it is not necessary to make confession, or to visit the churches and altars, but merely to purchase the confessional letter....

The fourth distinctive grace is for those souls which are in purgatory and is the complete remission of all sins, which remission the Pope brings to pass through his intercession to the advantage of said souls in this wise; that the same contribution shall be placed in the chest by a living person as one would make for himself. It is Our wish, however, that our sub-commissioners should modify the regulations regarding contributions of this kind which are given for the dead, and that they should use their judgment in all other cases where, in their opinion, modifications are desirable.

It is furthermore not necessary that the persons who place their contributions in the chest for the dead should be contrite in heart and have orally confessed, since this grace is based simply on the state of grace in which the dead departed and on the contribution of the living, as is evident from the text of the bull. Moreover, preachers shall exert themselves to give this grace the widest publicity, since through the same, help will surely come to departed souls and the construction of the Church of Saint Peter will be abundantly promoted at the same time....