

Document 1

Source: The Ninety-Five Theses or Disputations on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences of 1517 is the most famous document of Martin Luther's Reformation. Their importance lies in the fact that they are a small initial step that stirred up an international controversy and thereby set in motion the dramatic events that followed.

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.

20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words "plenary remission of all penalties," does not actually mean "all penalties," but only those imposed by himself.

21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.

24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.

28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.

32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.

43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences.

Document 2

Source: Sebastian Castellio, French Protestant theologian, Concerning Heretics, Basel, Switzerland, 1554.

I can discover no more than this, that we regard those as heretics with whom we disagree. This is evident from the fact that today there is scarcely one of our innumerable sects that does not look upon the rest as heretics, so that if you are orthodox in one city or region, you are held for a heretic in the next. . . Who would wish to be a Christian when he saw that those who confessed the name of Christ were destroyed by Christians themselves with fire, water, and the sword without mercy?

Document 3

Source: William, Prince of Orange and Archduke Matthias of Hapsburg, leaders of the Protestant and Catholic parties in the Dutch revolt against Spain, joint proclamation to the people of the Netherlands, Antwerp, 1578.

The Reformed religion is much followed and loved in this country not only because of the war, but also because we are hosts to merchants . . . of neighboring realms who adhere to this religion. . . . If we do not grant members of the Reformed Church freedom to exercise their religion . . . then our common enemy [Spain] will find it all the easier to harm us, while, if we are held together in close union by a peaceful accord, we shall be able to defend ourselves against all troubles and dangers.

Document 4

Source: King Henry IV of France, Edict of Nantes, 1598. This royal edict granted official religious toleration in France following a period of religious conflict.

And not to leave any occasion of trouble and difference among our subjects, we permit to those of the Reformed religion to live and dwell in all the cities and places of our Kingdom. . . without being inquired after, vexed, molested, or compelled to do anything in religion, contrary to their conscience, nor by reason of the same to be searched after in houses or places where they live, as long as they comport themselves in other things as is contained in this edict.

Document 5

Source: King Louis XIV of France, Edict of Fontainebleau, 1685.

We perceive, with thankful acknowledgment of God's aid, that the majority of our subjects who followed the Protestant religion have now embraced the Catholic faith. And therefore . . . we have determined that we can do nothing better, in order to obliterate the memory of the troubles, the confusion, and the evils which this false religion has caused in this kingdom than entirely to revoke the Edict of Nantes, as well as all that has since been done in favor of the said religion. . . .

We forbid our subjects of the Protestant religion, to meet any more for the exercise of the said religion in any place or private house, under any pretext whatsoever.

We enjoin all ministers of the said religion who do not choose to become converts and to embrace the Catholic religion to leave our Kingdom within two weeks of the publication of our present edict, without permission to reside therein beyond that period, or, during that period, to engage in any preaching, on pain of being sent to the galleys. . . .

Document 6

Source: Maria Theresa, Austrian empress, letter to her son and heir Joseph II, 1777.

[How can one rule] without a dominant religion? Toleration and indifference are precisely the true means of undermining everything. . . . He is no friend of humanity who allows everyone his own thoughts. . . . Will you allow everyone to fashion his own religion as he pleases? If there is no subordination to the Church, what will then become of us? A manifesto by you granting religious toleration can produce the utmost distress and make you responsible for many thousands of souls. What is at stake is not only the welfare of the State, but your own salvation. . . . I only wish that my son will return from his erroneous views, from those wicked books whose authors want to introduce an imaginary freedom which can never exist and which degenerates into license and into complete revolution.