

heard of, saying that "they cheated the simple layman of his soul."

The sale of indulgences was often arranged on a business basis by local agents of the pope or by local bankers in return for a percentage of the net receipts. Less than half of the gross receipts would actually reach the Roman treasury, after the payment of commissions to various individuals.

One does not have to be a Protestant to see the great need of reform at the beginning of the 16th century. Every Roman Catholic book of church history tells about the great need of reform at that time. When the Council of Constance opened, a century before the Reformation began, it was declared that one of its main objectives was to reform the church. But the ecclesiastical politicians succeeded in so directing the activities of the Council that in the end practically nothing was done in the way of reform.

The extent to which corruption had entered the church is clearly indicated by the wickedness, selfishness, violence, and sin of some of the popes during the decades immediately preceding the Reformation. Thus Sixtus IV (1471-1484) was generally regarded as having been involved in a plot to murder the leaders of the Medici in Florence. Alexander VI, the Borgia pope (1492-1503), who divided the New World between Spain and Portugal, was known to have his mistresses living with him in the Vatican. One of his sons was murdered, and another son, the infamous Caesar Borgia, was generally thought to have killed him. The very name of Borgia came to stand for intrigue and wickedness. Julius II (1503-1513), though already advanced in years, marched at the head of his armies to conquer Italian cities. After his death a clever satire was widely distributed, generally supposed to have been written by Erasmus, describing Julius II as coming to the gates of heaven and being refused admittance. In his well-known book, In Praise of Folly, Erasmus derided the sins of popes and church dignitaries of every sort.