Reflecting on Luther's Theses

Read these five excerpts from Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*. Then answer the reflection questions. Use a separate sheet of paper if you need more room.

Excerpts from Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*

Thesis 32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon [indulgences].

Thesis 36. Any Christian whatsoever, who is truly repentant, enjoys plenary [complete] remission from penalty and guilt, and this is given him without letters of indulgence.

Thesis 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.

Thesis 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.

Thesis 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.

1. What does Luther say leads to true remission of guilt?

2. According to Luther, what should Christians do instead of buying indulgences?

3. What contrast does Luther describe in Thesis 40? Explain it in your own words.

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4. Do you agree with Luther's observation about human nature in Thesis 40? Why or why not?

5. Given what you have learned about the original purpose of indulgences, do you think indulgences can be an effective way to promote Christian piety? Why or why not?

6. Which of Martin Luther's actions and choices do you agree with, and why?

7. Which of Martin Luther's actions and choices do you believe could have been handled more effectively through different means? What would you have done differently?

8. Did the Church respond appropriately to Martin Luther's concerns? If you were Pope at the time Luther posted his *Ninety-five Theses,* how would you have responded?

(The excerpts on this handout are from "Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," in *Works of Martin Luther*, Adolph Spaeth, L. D. Reed, and Henry Eyster Jacobs, editors and translators [Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915], at *www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/ninetyfive.html*.)

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