



# Goahead Theological Seminary & College

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## Indulgences

An indulgence is a certificate that claims to forgive sins committed by the Western Church and was issued and sold in large quantities by the Vatican in the 16th century for special purposes.

In Catholicism, an indulgence (Latin: *indulgentia*) or an indulgence is explained as a token that the Pope has granted remission (*absolutio poenae*) of the temporal punishment remaining after the forgiveness of sins.

According to Western Church doctrine before the 16th century, a temporal punishment for already forgiven sins required penance in this life. This certificate certifies partial or complete remission of this penalty. At the time, the Vatican issued large quantities of these certificates to finance the construction of Roman Catholic cathedrals, and bishops sold them to their followers, often forcibly. They became a key factor in the Protestant Reformation and a central point of criticism in Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses.

## Designation

The original Latin word for indulgence, "*Indulgentia*," means generosity.

The term "*indulgentia*," translated into Chinese characters in China, where Catholicism was introduced before Korea, originated from the Catholic doctrine that bishops have the power to grant "absolution." Even today, it is clearly stated in Chinese Catholic doctrine books and in explanations of the authority of Catholic bishops.

Bishops are considered to have the "power to grant indulgences (pardons)."

The papal pardon power was naturally used in the same way as the episcopal pardon power, namely "indulgence," or "pardon of sins," and is still used in Chinese documents provided by the Vatican today.

An indulgence (免罪符) refers to a document certifying absolution granted under the episcopal pardon power. In Chinese characters, it is written as "赦免罪過符," meaning "certificate of forgiveness of sins." This is also written as "免罪符."



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## **History of the Use of Indulgences**

Before the Reformation in the Western Church, indulgences had been widely distributed in Western Europe since before the 11th century, written by local clergy to comfort the families of the deceased, who were uncertain whether their conduct during their lifetime had led them to heaven.

Beginning in the 11th century, Pope Urban II began using the papal power to encourage participation in the Crusades, granting indulgences to soldiers participating in the war and to sponsors who contributed to the military units. These indulgences could be seen as privileged benefits for participation and support in the 11th century.

By the time of Pope Leo X in the 16th century, it was being used as a means of raising funds for the papal debts and expenses. Large quantities were sold primarily to finance war expenses, the reconstruction of Rome after the Avignon Papacy, and the large-scale renovation and renovation of St. Peter's Basilica.

In the 16th century, indulgences sold for a quarter of a florin, equivalent to six months' rent on a small house for a commoner or the purchase of three calves. Even ordinary citizens, struggling to pay various taxes, were issued indulgences for specific purposes, encouraging families to purchase multiple indulgences. This massive sum of money flowed directly to the Vatican. The Western Church had already been facing ongoing calls for church reform in various regions since the 10th century due to issues with prostitution and the political power of the church. The mass sale of indulgences as a fundraising tactic became the fuse for the Reformation. Ultimately, the Western Church was divided into pro- and anti-Reformation factions, with those in favor becoming Protestants and those against becoming Catholics.

The Catholic Church now defines its past abuse of indulgences as an evil act resulting from corruption and the beginning of division in the church.

## **The problem of the name of indulgences/indulgences**

Since the term "indulgence" was imported into the modern era, most Korean speakers have used it, and Korean Protestant circles also support the term.



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However, Korean Catholics, citing the doctrine of "indulgence" as a mistranslation and a potential for malicious misuse, have requested that the term "indulgence" be discontinued for 16th-century Catholic certificates. The historical and educational communities support this, adopting the term "indulgence punishment" instead.

The Korean language academic community and the Ministry of Education accepted this proposal. The current Standard Korean Dictionary recognizes both "indulgence" and "punishment," and the Ministry of Education revised the term "indulgence" in textbooks to "punishment."

## **The issue in question**

### **The difference between sin and punishment**

Proponents of indulgences argue that the Korean Catholic Church has failed to fully grasp the fact that the Korean word "sin" (sin) connotes both crime and punishment. Linguistically, they support this assertion by citing the expression "sinbatda" (sin-bat-da).

Furthermore, some Protestants argue that forgiveness of sins belongs solely to God and that purgatory does not exist, making the distinction between punishment and sin meaningless. This assertion, a reiteration of Luther's argument, is a reiteration of Luther's argument. However, supporters of indulgences argue that the Korean language defines "sin" and "punishment" differently, and that Catholic doctrine also distinguishes between sin and punishment, so it is appropriate to translate Catholic terminology within a Catholic context.

### **The social nature of language**

Eliminating the already widespread term "indulgence" from the curriculum ignores the social nature of language, and the proliferation of terms like "indulgence," "absolution," and "indulgence" has led to confusion among students.



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To address this issue, the Catholic Church in Korea has internally included instruction on indulgences and "indulgence" in catechumenate education and externally posted materials indicating that the term "indulgence" is a mistranslation within Catholic doctrine and demanded corrections. However, the persistent use of the term "indulgence" has not improved the situation.

## **Non-use of the term "absolution" within the Korean Catholic Church**

The Korean Catholic Church, which proposed changing the term "indulgence" to "indulgence," may seem to lack a grasp of terminology by not using the theological term "indulgence." However, the original change requested by the Korean Catholic Church was "indulgence." However, "indulgence" is a term difficult to understand outside the Catholic Church. Therefore, regardless of the terminology used internally by the Korean Catholic Church, it would be reasonable to demand the use of easily understandable terminology in textbooks intended for use by non-Catholics as well.

## **Translation of Catholicism in other Chinese character cultural spheres**

The Japanese Catholic Church has continuously suggested to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology that the term for indulgences be changed to "shokuyuzo" (贖宥状, shokuyukuyujo), and this has recently been changed in textbooks. This was in accordance with the argument that since the Japanese word "sin" has a strong connotation of crime and almost no connotation of punishment, the meaning of indulgences is limited to crime.