

Early Papal Indulgences for Christians Fighting Muslims

[Translated by the students of Pomona College Classics 103 ("Medieval Latin Translation"): Sam Kaplan, Daniel Martin, Lily Stewart, and Maria Young, under the guidance of Professor Ken Wolf (Fall, 2013)]

Leo IV (847-855), "To the Army of the Franks" [PL 115:655]

Laying aside all fear and dread, strive to act in a manly way against the enemies of the holy faith and the adversaries of all regions. Up until now, whenever your parents mobilized their military forces, they always emerged victorious; no multitude of people was ever able to overcome them. We are aware of no time when they were turned back without the fame of a victory. We wish the charity of all of your [men] to know that whoever shall have died—we say this hoping it does not happen—in the faith [*fideliter*] in this struggle of war, the celestial kingdoms of heaven will by no means be denied [to him]. The All Powerful knows, when any of you die, whether you have died for the sake of the truth of the faith, the protection of the homeland, and the defense of Christians. For that reason the aforementioned reward from Him will follow.

John VIII (872-882), "To the bishops constituted in kingdom of Louis [II 'the Stammerer']" (879) [PL 126:816]

To all the most reverent and most holy venerable bishops throughout the entire kingdom of my most beloved son, Louis.

Because your venerable fraternity has inquired, asking with modest inquiry, whether those who lately died in war in defense of the holy church of God and for the state of the Christian religion and republic and those who, of the ones left behind, are about to die, might be able to secure a pardon [*indulgentia*] for their sins, let us respond boldly with the piety of our Christ God that those who fall, with the piety of the Catholic religion, in a battle of war, fighting vigorously against pagans and infidels, will the repose of eternal life will receive them, because the Lord deigned to say through a prophet: "in whatever hour the sinner shall have converted, I will not remember any longer the iniquity of that one."¹ And that venerable thief deserved paradise based on one word of confession from the cross.² Also Manasseh, formerly a most impure king, was captured and bound in the most confining jail, but, doing penance there, with the perfection of forgiveness [*indulgentia*], obtained the throne of his former kingdom on account of the mercy of the Lord, which is immense toward the race of men.³ With our mediocrity and the intercession of St. Peter the Apostle, whose power of binding and loosing [applies] in heaven as well as on earth, to the extent that it is lawful, we have absolved the aforementioned and we commend them to the Lord with our prayers. We wish your fraternity to be strong in Christ. Given as above.

¹ Based on Ezechiel 18:23.

² Luke 23:43.

³ II Chronicles 33:11-13.