

Medieval Church History

Medieval Thought and Theology

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When studying the theology of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, it is imperative to understand the medieval philosophical-theological mind of Martin Luther and the other Reformers. We must never forget that as John the Baptist was essentially part of the Old Testament era and economy (although the world was in transition with the coming of Christ), so the first Reformers, particularly Martin Luther, were essentially part of the Medieval world.

Therefore, in order to better understand Martin Luther's Reformation, we must seek to understand the medieval mind of Martin Luther. In seeking to grasp medieval thought and theology, we will better understand the issues of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century.

Historian Philip Schaff wrote "Medieval Christianity is, on the one hand, a legitimate continuation and further development of ancient Catholicism; on the other hand, a preparation for Protestantism. Its leading forces are the papacy, monasticism, and scholasticism, which were developed to their height, and then assailed by growing opposition from within" (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. IV, pg. 11).

Gregory I (the Great) (c. 540-604)

Gregory (also known as "Gregory the Great" or "Pope Gregory I") is considered the last of the Latin Fathers of the early Church and the first of the popes. He excelled in learning and was monastic, ascetic, and devout in practice, and successfully sent many missionaries to the Barbarians in order for them to be disciplined in the School of Christ (He sent Augustine of Canterbury as a missionary to England). He was the primary interpreter of Augustine's theology to the Middle Ages. He is called one of the Doctors of the Latin Church along with Ambrose, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and Jerome. In administrative abilities and achievements, he is considered one of the greatest of the popes.

Gregory was born in Rome of a wealthy Roman senatorial Christian family and was educated for the service of government. He became learned in the Latin literature of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine during his theological training. By 574, he had devoted his wealth to the founding of monasteries and to helping the poor. He became a member of the monastery of St. Andrew. In 590, he was chosen Pope, being the first monk to attain the office. He died on March 12, 604.

Gregory exercised full authority over the Church as Peter's supposed successor, and because of the unique time period in which he lived when many people did not know the Christian faith, he further established the authority of the papacy through missionary activity, serving as the Schoolmaster for Christ over the "dark and heathen lands". As Bishop of Rome, Gregory regarded the four patriarchs of Constantinople ("New Rome"), Alexandria (Egypt), Antioch, and Jerusalem, as coordinate leaders, but he still held a firm belief in the power of the papacy at Rome (he thought the other sees were nearly, but not quite on a par with Rome). He called and described himself to the other patriarchs as the *Servus servorum Dei* or "the servant of the servants of God." Tradition has ascribed to Gregory a great work in the reformation of church music known as the "Gregorian chants", and in the development of the Roman liturgy.

Gregory's Theology- Gregory asserted that his theology was based primarily upon the four gospels and the four ecumenical councils (**Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon**) of the Church which he thought were the four pillars of the Christian faith. Gregory was Augustinian in his theology by profession, but he had a moderate interpretation and understanding of Augustine's theology, and would be closer to what might be termed "**Semi-Augustinianism**" (but in fact, his views on sin and grace are semi-Pelagian). He held that the number of the elect is fixed, and depends upon God, but he had no such interest in considering the doctrine of predestination as Augustine had articulated it, emphasizing God's absolute sovereign grace. He speaks of predestination as simply divine foreknowledge (*prescience*), and therefore makes predestination depend on God's foreknowledge of one's faith and represents the fallen nature as only sick rather than dead (*contra* Augustine). He believed that our good works in which we cooperate with God are meritorious, and he developed the doctrine of Purgatory as well as masses for the dead in Purgatory (His *Dialogues* are considered the chief source for the Medieval superstition of Purgatory).

"Man is fettered in Original Sin, the evidence of which is his birth through lust...Man is rescued from this condition by the work of Christ, received in baptism...but sins after baptism must be satisfied...works of merit wrought by God's assisting grace make satisfaction...The good that we do is both of God and of ourselves; of God by prevenient grace, our own by good will following."

Because he became the primary interpreter of Augustine's theology to the Middle Ages, the majority of the teachers in the Medieval Church were moderate Augustinians (or **Semi-Pelagian** in their theology of sin and grace, even though this had been condemned at the Synod Orange in 529, Augustine's doctrines of absolute predestination and irresistible grace were unfortunately not formally formulated at the council).

Philip Schaff wrote of the Semi-Augustinian Medieval theology: "...The prevailing [theological] sentiment [of the Middle Ages] cautiously steered midway between Augustinianism and Semi-Pelagianism, giving the chief weight to the preceding and enabling grace of God, yet claiming some merit for man's consenting and cooperating will. This compromise may be called Semi-Augustinianism, as distinct from Semi-Pelagianism" (Schaff, Vol. IV, pg. 524). Although the accentuation was placed

theologically on God's grace in Semi-Augustinianism (finding the grace to cooperate with God in the sacraments of the visible Church) in distinction from Semi-Pelagianism's primary accent upon man's will, they are both essentially synergistic systems of salvation that place the emphasis upon man's cooperating with God in order to achieve salvation, rather than upon God's sovereign grace in predestination and regeneration.

A book of Gregory's that was much appreciated and read by many during the Middle Ages was his *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* (*The Book of the Pastoral Rule*) which was a pastoral theology encouraging preaching and the importance of clergy to preach sound doctrine and to live holy lives as an example to their congregations.

The Doctrine of Penance during the time of Gregory became the cure for sins after baptism (or in the words of Aquinas: "Penance was the second plank of salvation for those who have shipwrecked in their faith"). Gregory wrote: "The church has many helps for he who would seek merit or exercise penance...the greatest is the **Eucharist**," which Gregory viewed as a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, available for the living and the dead (It would not be until the **Fourth Lateran Council-1215** that the doctrine of **Transubstantiation** would be officially accepted by the Roman Church). Gregory wrote: To do penance there is also the aid of the saints...Those who trust in no works of their own should run to the protection of the holy martyrs...for those who, while really disciples of Christ, make an insufficient use of these opportunities to achieve works of merit, fail to do penance, or avail themselves inadequately of the helps offered in the church, there remain the purifying fires of purgatory."

Important Leaders and Theologians during the Medieval Period (c.590-c.1517)

Charles the Great (*Charlemagne*) (742-814) - Creation of Papal States under Charles' rule as emperor made pope a temporal ruler. Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as the "Sword" of the Holy Roman Empire and set stage for power struggle between church and state.

Hildebrand (Gregory VII) (c.1021-1085) - His reform of the papacy enhanced his power as pope. His rule was characterized by a theocracy based on the Mosaic model and the canon law that stressed the absolute sovereignty of the Church in this world. He used excommunication and the papal interdict as weapons against the ruling state (temporal ruler). He rejected Augustine's teaching on the distinction between the visible and invisible Church and said that the Kingdom of God or City of God is found in the visible Church of Christ.

Innocent III (1161-1216) - Papal power reaches ultimate power. He claimed absolute spiritual and temporal authority over the Holy Roman Empire.

Paschasius Radbertus (c.785-865) - An early proponent of transubstantiation (although this term was not used until two centuries later), and the first who clearly set forth the

doctrine of transubstantiation that was later formally accepted as the Roman Catholic position. In his book *On the Body and Blood of the Lord* (831) he taught that the *substance* (essence) of bread and wine is *effectually changed* into the flesh and blood of Christ, so that after the priestly consecration there is nothing else in the Eucharist but the flesh and blood of Christ, though the *figure* (*accidens*) remains bread and wine. This miracle is brought about by the Holy Spirit, in a similar way that he overshadowed the Virgin Mary in Jesus' conception. He supports his doctrine by a literal reading of John chapter 6.

Ratramnus (d. 868) - He was a contemporary opponent of Radbertus' doctrine of the Eucharist. He taught that the elements remain in reality what they were before the consecration of the priest, and that they are the body and blood of the Christ only in a spiritual sense, received by faith to believers. He calls the consecrated bread and wine signs and seals of the body and blood of Christ; they are visible tokens of the Lord's death and the visual reality of God's promises to provide a once and for all sacrifice for his people.

Gottschalk (805-868) – He was a Benedictine theologian who defended the Augustinian doctrine of **predestination** for which he was condemned and imprisoned. Treated brutally because of this, died after 20 years in prison and was denied Christian burial. He wrote that God had sovereignly predestinated some men to life and some to eternal death. God having from eternity predestinated his elect by free grace to eternal life, and all reprobates, by a just judgment for their evil deeds, to eternal death. He also articulated the doctrine that would later be known as **“Definite Atonement”** or “Limited Atonement” or “Particular Redemption” in the Reformation that taught that the Son of God became man to live and die only for the elect. From his prison, Gottschalk confessed “I believe and confess that God foreknew and foreordained the holy angels and elect men to unmerited eternal life, but that he equally foreordained the devil with his host and with all reprobate men, *on account of their foreseen future evil deeds*, by a just judgment, to *merited* eternal death.” Gottschalk preceded the teaching of the Reformation and particularly of John Calvin in saying that Christ died *efficiently* only for the elect, although *sufficiently* for all men. In other words, he believed that Christ's sacrifice could be efficacious for all men, but the purpose and scope of Christ's redemption was for the elect only that God had predestinated by his grace.

Anselm (1033-1109) - Wrote *Cur Deus Homo?* (why the God-Man?). he developed the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Devised ontological argument for the existence of God (see larger study on Anselm and Thomas Aquinas).

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) – A Scholastic philosopher and theologian from Brittany (Province of France) who attracted a great many students. He was an opponent of Anselm's Satisfaction View of the Atonement (see study on Anselm), and his theological career was threatened with his relationship to Heloise. He allegedly taught heresy concerning the Trinity according to a Council in Soissons in 1121 and by the criticism of Bernard of Clairvaux. His most famous book *Sic et Non* (1122) was immensely popular in the medieval period, influencing the methodology of the Schoolmen in the way that

they sought to reconcile disagreements between the Church Fathers and Scripture. In *Sic et Non* Abelard arranged contradictory statements from the Scriptures and the Church Fathers and assigned his student to reconcile them reasonably. His greatest contribution to medieval thought was to initiate the task of reconciling faith and reason.

Albertus Magnus (1193-1280) - Dominican theologian born in Swabia (Germany) and considered the greatest of the German medieval theologians. He taught most of his life at the University of Paris and was the first Christian scholar to master all the works of **Aristotle**. He wrote massive commentaries on the Works of Aristotle and attempted to reconcile philosophy with Christianity, including the importance of affirming a peaceful coexistence between science and religion. He profoundly influenced **Aquinas** as his teacher by making the important distinction without separation between the realm of revelation and that of human reason (although in the 15th century there would be an “Albertist” school recognized in contrast to the “Thomists”). One of Roman Catholicism’s 33 recognized **“Doctors of the Church”**.

Bonaventura (1221-1274) – Bonaventura was a Franciscan theologian born in Italy, who has been called the “Prince of Mystics”. He believed that the intercession of St. Francis of Assisi had saved him from a terminal childhood illness. He was a doctor of theology and taught at the University of Paris, becoming eventually a cardinal in 1273 (“Cardinal Bishop of Albano” was his title). He was Augustinian in his theology and had only a limited appreciation for the philosophy of Aristotle. He taught that even the greatest of human wisdom is folly in comparison to the illumination that God gives by His Spirit to the faithful Christian. Bonaventura’s works are saturated with Scripture and the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Schoolmen – These were teachers of philosophy and theology at the medieval European universities who were exponents of Scholasticism (see discussion below). The Schoolmen discussed how **Aristotelian philosophy** could be applied to the doctrines of the Church. Their method of teaching was called the “Dialectic” where the truth of opinions was discussed logically. The Schoolmen collected, analyzed, and systematized the doctrines of the Church Fathers and the teachings of Scripture. Some of the most prominent of the Schoolmen were **Thomas Aquinas** the Dominican and **Duns Scotus** the Franciscan. The Schoolmen are the guys of which it is apocryphally thought to have asked “*How many angels can dance on the head of pin?*” Although it is true that they asked questions such as “*Did God love the human race more than Christ?*” “*Could God have taken on the female sex in the Incarnation?*” “*Will man in the resurrection receive back from God the rib lost in Eden and whether a man will recover all the clippings of his finger nails?*” and the like.

Peter Lombard (1095-c.1159) - Wrote *Sentences*, which became the first standard medieval systematic theology. He emphasized seven sacraments.

John Scotus Erigena (c. 810-c. 877) – Often called the first Scholastic Theologian (but some historians claim this title for Anselm of Canterbury). He was from Ireland and a chief interpreter of Greek thought and philosophy in the West. In his work *De Divisione*

Naturae John made no distinction between theology and philosophy, yet attempted to demonstrate a rational presentation of Christian truth.

Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274) - Dominican monk who studied under Albertus Magnus. Wrote theology that was based primarily on his influences from Aristotle and Augustine. He was the most influential theologian in the Roman Catholic Church during the second millennium A.D. Thomas Wrote a systematic theology called *Summa Theologica* (see study on Aquinas).

Duns Scotus (1266-1308) – Franciscan monk and Scholastic Theologian (see discussion below) who was born in Scotland whose ideas seemed obscure and difficult to understand (the Reformers called anyone whose ideas were obscure “duns” which became our word “dunce”). He was critical of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in his attempt to harmonize Christianity and Aristotle, arguing that Christianity could not be supported by logical proofs. He influenced the division between faith and reason in the Late Medieval Period. He believed that all of theology must be accepted by faith without an attempt to argue reasonably for this truth. He was the first to articulate and defend the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Those who followed his teachings became a branch of Scholastic Theology known as “Scotists” and continued to widen the gap between faith and reason.

William of Ockham (c. 1280-1349) – A Franciscan monk who was a Scholastic theologian and philosopher born in Surrey, England. He taught at Avignon and Oxford and lectured on Peter Abelard’s *Sentences* as well as the writings of Aristotle. His most important work was *Summa Logicae*. Ockham criticized any accommodation of Aristotle’s philosophy with Christian doctrine that had been made famous by Thomas Aquinas before him.

William was a Nominalist influenced by his empiricism that the basis of all knowledge is the direct experience of individual things. Nominalists thought that Platonic universals did not actually exist in reality, but only in “name”, and therefore they denied that reality was found in so-called metaphysical “universals” or “forms” (as Plato and the Realists taught), but that reality is found in the things themselves (For example, he would have said that a Boston Terrier puppy named Slurpee was more real than the idea or universal of “Boston-Terrier-Puppiness”; or a red chair in a parlor in France was more real than the mere idea of “Red Chairness” as a universal; he would have said that “Boston-Terrier-Puppiness” and “Red Chairness” are not real but created in the mind). He was influential on the scientific method because he taught that the natural phenomena could be investigated rationally (some call him the father of modern epistemology). To William, God was above all knowledge. He denied that God could be apprehended by reason (as the Thomists thought), or by illumination (as the Augustinians believed), but could only be apprehended by faith. He is known for his “razor” (“Ockham’s Razor”) which said “that what can be done with fewer assumptions is done in vain with more” and was intended to make theological method and content simpler (In Latin Ockham’s Razor says *"entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem"*, or translate *"entities*

should not be multiplied beyond necessity"). This might be translated today "Keep it simple stupid!"

Nominalism and Realism – Aristotle influenced the theology of the Middle Ages tremendously. Two schools of thought distinguished the Scholastic Theologians: **Nominalists and Realists**. Nominalists believed that reality consisted of individual items and not merely in "name" (nominal) such as universals or ideas or forms (see above); the Realists believed like Plato that reality was made up of ideas or universals that truly existed objectively outside, or independent of a person's reason (which Aristotelian Nominalists denied). Nominalists believed that universals or essences had no independent reality of their own outside one's own creation by reason. Peter Abelard and William of Ockham (see above) are the most prominent medieval Nominalists. Martin Luther and the Reformers rejected Nominalism. Nominalism tended toward subjectivity in philosophy and theology, while Realism tended toward a focus on objectivity. Theologically Nominalists tended to place emphasis on man's will and ability to act before God with regard to how a person is saved, whereas Realists tended to believe in the objective sovereign predestination of God in election.

Benedictines (c. 529) – Monastic order founded by Benedict of Nursia in Monte Cassino, Italy. 'The Venerable' Bede (c. 673-735) and Boniface (c. 675-754 the "Apostle of Germany") were significant members of this order. This became the first monastic order based on the Benedictine Rule (precepts for monks living in community under the authority of an Abbot).

Augustinians (date and place of origin unknown) – A monastic order of Augustinian Hermits or Friars who followed the rule of St. Augustine (a guide to religious life). Thomas a Kempis (c. 1380-1471) who wrote the *Imitation of Christ*, Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358) who was a medieval philosopher, the Christian Humanist Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466-1536) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) were significant members.

Dominicans (1216) – Monastic order founded by St. Dominic Guzman in Spain (also known as the "Black Friars" or OP *Ordo Praedicatorum* "Order of Preachers"). This order used the rule of St. Augustine and was committed to preaching and a lifetime of theological study. This order was used by popes to root out heresy, and they were involved in the conducting of the Inquisition. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Albertus Magnus (1206-1280), Girolama Savonarola (1452-1498) were significant members.

Franciscans (1209, 1221) – Monastic order founded by Francis of Assisi in Italy (called also "The Order of Friars Minor"). Their original rule was taken from Scripture alone in 1209, but the rule was recast in 1221. The Franciscans were mendicant (begging) preachers who took vows of absolute poverty and were dedicated to working with hands. Bonaventure (1221-1274), Duns Scotus (1266-1308), William of Ockham (1288-1349) were significant members.

A Concise Introduction to Medieval Roman Catholic Theology

The Roman Catholic theological confusion of Justification and Sanctification: The Medieval Roman Catholic Church taught that the sacraments work *ex opere operato*, or by the power of the completed act, and the validity of the sacraments does not depend on the orthodoxy of the minister, or his state of grace. Grace is infused into the sinner through the Sacraments making the sinner righteous; thereby God then justifies the sinner based on this real and inherent righteousness within the person. In Roman Catholic theology sanctification precedes justification; the sinner is infused with righteousness by cooperating with the grace found in the sacraments of the Church and this eventually brings justification or a right standing before God because the sinners has been made righteous.

The Roman Catholic Sacramental Means of Grace

Seven Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Order, and Matrimony. The following definitions taken from: *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma (1952)* by Roman Catholic Theologian Ludwig Ott, approved with the Papal *Imprimatur*.

Baptism

Baptism is the means of the remission of the guilt of original sin. In the case of adults, baptism also is the means of the eradication of all personal, mortal, or venial sins. Even when unworthily received, baptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the "Baptismal Character", and cannot be repeated. The Council of Trent (1545-1563), Session 7, Canon 14, condemned the denier of this doctrine.

Confirmation

In this sacrament by the imposition of hands, unction, and prayer, a baptized person is filled with the Holy Spirit for the inner strengthening of the supernatural life and for courageous outward testimony. By this sacrament baptismal grace is perfected. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) Session 7, Canon 3, condemned the denier of this doctrine.

The Eucharist

Eucharist is from a Greek word that means "thanksgiving". The Eucharist was an early name for the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. The Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, first propounded by Paschasius Radbertus (ca.785-860), was defined as dogma by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The Eucharistic sacrifice was first defined as dogma by the Council of Trent in 1562 (Session 22, Canon 9) when the Roman Catholic Church also declared the condemnation of anyone who denies this doctrine.

The Council of Trent stated that the "Same Christ" is sacrificed in an "unbloody manner, who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross." The effects of the Eucharist are unification with Christ and the preservation and increase of supernatural life, and it is a pledge of heavenly bliss and future resurrection. As a sacrament Christ is partaken as nourishment for the soul. As a sacrifice He is offered as a sacrificial gift to

God. Theologian Ludwig Ott wrote, "The purpose of the sacrifice is the same in the sacrifice of the Mass as in the Sacrifice of the Cross; primarily the glorification of God, secondarily atonement, thanksgiving, and appeal....the Eucharist is atoning...a sacrifice of propitiation and can be offered "not only for the living, but also for the poor souls in Purgatory."

Extreme Unction ("Last Rites" or "Final Anointing" or "Anointing of the Sick")

Ott wrote: "It is a Sacrament of the Living. It presupposes in general the remission of grievous sins. But if a person in mortal sin is seriously ill and can no longer receive the Sacrament of Penance, or if he erroneously believes that he is free from grievous sin, Extreme Unction eradicates the grievous sins per accidens, but still by reason of Christ's institution." Only Bishops and Priests can administer the sacrament of extreme unction. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) Session 14, Canon 4 made this doctrine the official teaching of Rome.

Penance (Reconciliation/Confession)

Penance is the act of confession on the part of the penitent, together with the priest's pronouncement of absolution and his assigning of certain works to be done by the penitent. In a Roman Catholic training book called *Instructions for Non-Catholics* we read: "In the Sacrament of Penance, God gives the priest the power to bring sinners back into the state of grace and to prevent them from falling into the abyss of hell. Moreover, after confession some temporal punishment due to sin generally remains, and some of this punishment is taken away in the penance (prayers) the priest gives you to say. You should perform other acts of penance also so that you can make up for the temporal punishment due to sin and to avoid a long stay in purgatory. The Church suggests these forms of penance: prayer, fasting, giving alms in the name of Christ, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, the patient sufferings of the ills of life, and the gaining of indulgences." (Pg.95)

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are three parts to penance: contritio, confessio, and satisfactio (contrition, confession, and satisfaction). Contrition is the realization by the sinner because of the love of God that they have sinned, but one cannot be forgiven merely by contrition. One must then confess, and in confession the penitent (the one who is contrite or repentant) accuses himself of his sins before an ordained priest (known as a "confessor"). After confession, the penitent prays an Act of Contrition and the priest absolves the penitent of their sins. The priest then assigns a penance to be performed that will satisfy for their sins, commonly a series of recitations of prayers such as the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary, meditation on Scripture, and praying the rosary.

The Church of Rome demands acts of Penance before she grants forgiveness, inferring that the sacrifice of Christ was not sufficient to atone fully for sin and that it must be supplemented to some extent by these good works (faith + works → Justification/ "faith plus works brings justification"- synergism). God demands repentance, which means turning from sin, vices, injustice and all wickedness in whatever form: Isaiah 55:7- "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly

pardon” (cf. 1 John 1:8-2:2). From the Greek New Testament edited by Erasmus, Luther discovered that Jesus did not say "Do Penance," as interpreted by Rome because of Jerome’s Vulgate translation, but Jesus said "Repent."

Rome teaches that salvation depends ultimately upon ourselves, upon what we do, that one can "earn" salvation by obedience to the laws of the church, indeed that the saints can even store up excess merits in heaven beyond the requirements of duty, through such things as regular attendance at church, masses, rosary prayers, fastings, wearing of crucifixes etc. These excess merits are called "works of supererogation." Mary and the saints are said to have stored up vast treasures of merit, from which the pope can draw and dispense to the faithful as they perform the works assigned by the priests. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) in Session 14, Canon 15 and Session 25 made penance an official doctrine of the Roman Church.

Treasury of Merit

During the Medieval period after Gregory I (the Great), Rome spoke of merit in several ways: 1) Condign Merit (*meritum de condigno*) and 2) Congruous Merit (*meritum de congruo*). In addition, Rome spoke of a treasury of merit that accrued from the merit of Christ and the supererogatory merit of Mary and the saints. The concept of merit was tied closely to the sacrament of penance, and the indulgence controversy in Luther’s time focused heavily on this concept.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares: "The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance." Rome defines an indulgence as:

"An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of satisfactions of Christ and the saints...An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin, and may be applied to the living or the dead." {Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5}

"This Treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary...also are the prayers and good works of the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by His grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body." {Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5}. The Doctrine of Indulgences (and the Treasury of Merit) was made official Roman Catholic doctrine at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) in Session 25, Canon.

Scholasticism

Scholasticism is a term to describe the philosophy and theology of the medieval period, particularly of the time between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. The Scholastic

Theologians accepted the authority of Scripture, but sought to arrange the interpretations of the Church Fathers into an orderly systemic theology (or what was called a *Summa*). It can be challenging to articulate one definition of this medieval thought, but Scholasticism progressively became a system of thought that had elements of being tradition-bound in their theology (rather than a scriptural-biblical theology), and came to depend almost entirely on the philosophy of Aristotle to articulate doctrine. For medieval theologians, Aristotle was the master philosophical thinker (often called in their writings “The Philosopher”). Essentially, Scholasticism desired to take the brilliance of Aristotle’s philosophy and use it to do theology. Scholasticism was an attempt for theologians of the Church to understand the relationship between faith and reason.

Although Scholastics affirmed that the Bible was the basis for their theology, unfortunately, what progressively and gradually happened was for Aristotle’s philosophy to eclipse the knowledge of biblical truth; Aristotle’s philosophy eventually usurped the authority of Scripture, and beginning with revelation as the starting point of all theology. Boethius’ (d. 525) was an influential 6th century theologian who sought to translate and interpret Aristotle’s works. His work *On the Trinity* focuses his argumentation on reasonably explaining the biblical revelation of the Trinity from his learning of Aristotle. Thus the seeds of this methodology were planted early in the Middle Ages.

As political order was being restored by Charlemagne in the 9th century, the culture began to largely assimilate classical culture. Much of the teaching in the medieval schools (monasteries and universities such as Paris, Oxford, Pisa, Bologna, and Salerno) was focused on the reading and explanation of classic Greek and Roman texts, particularly the classical philosophers such as Aristotle. Scripture was also read and commented on, and gave a foundational revelation of truth that could not be gained merely from the study of rational men, and most of the medieval theologians had a methodology similar to Anselm’s that a person must believe in order to understand, and therefore there was an attempt to make a proper distinction made between faith and reason.

In Peter Abelard’s book *Sic et Non* or “Yes and No” Abelard taught a theological method by resolving disagreements and contradictions between theologians (primarily the Church Fathers) and forcing students to take these contradictory opinions and reconcile them reasonably (but also implying that tradition and authority were insufficient in themselves). Abelard revolted against tradition and placed an emphasis upon the individual philosopher to use his own reason; this mindset greatly influenced the Scholastic theologians of the later medieval period. Although Abelard was unable to answer all the questions he raised in *Sic et Non* his methodology of asking questions and then answering them influenced Thomas Aquinas who did indeed succeed in answering many of the questions he raised in a substantial way. In Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* which became the most important and influential textbook of the Medieval Church, he arranged the teaching of the bible with the Church Fathers on the topics of God, creatures, incarnation, redemption, the sacraments, and eschatology.

By the 13th century, the theological questions began gradually to be answered not so much with the revelation of the Bible, but considering them reasonably with man’s finite

and limited mind. At this time, there gradually was more of an emphasis placed on reason and tradition, particularly Aristotle's philosophy, over the authority of Scripture. As part of the wealth of learning brought back from the Crusades was the advanced works of Aristotle that had been translated in the 13th century and revealed more of Aristotle's theological thinking. Medieval Scholastics were brought to the realization that in Aristotle's advanced works he articulated a system of thought based solely on man's reason; Ideas such as the prime mover, eternal motion, a denial of providence and creation, uncertainty about immortality and the soul, and a morality based on reason alone that caused great problems for these medieval scholars. Some wholly rejected Aristotle, the papacy forbade some of his writings, and some advocated the theory of double truth (truth in reason; truth in revelation). Gottfried of St. Victor had a saying that became famous in the Paris schools: 'Everyone is excluded and banned who does not come clad in Aristotle's armor.'

By 1270 at the University of Paris, rather than theologians merely comparing Aristotle's philosophy with theology, biblical theology was in many ways being discounted for the sake of Aristotle's reasonable articulation of truth. For many theologians of the Late Medieval Period, Aristotle was given the final word on truth. Some held that there was one truth for philosophy arrived at through reason, and one truth that was true for theology arrived at through revelation in Scripture (although brilliant theologians like Thomas Aquinas insisted that all truth was one).

This kind of dependence upon Aristotle led to an unrestrained rationalism in the Church, particularly with the theologians of the Late Medieval Church. Although this was not the official position of the Medieval Church, it was an immensely popular methodology. Aquinas believed that philosophy could serve faith, but for many such as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham the relationship between faith and reason seemed to be an impossible alliance and relationship.

The crowning achievement and bright light of Scholastic Theology is Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* where Thomas sought to answer theological questions as a handbook for beginners in theology. Thomas rightly made the proper distinction between philosophy and theology, and faith and reason.

By 1350, the study of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers were no longer mandatory in the ecclesiastical schools, and the historical sense or context of the Scriptures being interpreted in and by the Church was lost for many theologians. Scholastic Theologians without an anchor and grounding in Scripture and the faithful interpretation of Scripture before them in the Church, articulated many fanciful and speculative theologies, and could not come to a consensus as to what was true, and so these differences caused the theologians to group themselves into schools of thought, such as Thomists, Ockhamists, and Scotists.

These differences among the Scholastics and the eclipse of biblical revelation set the stage for Erasmus' writings against the "Schoolmen" or Scholastic theologians, and more importantly Luther's discounting of Aristotle's philosophy, a return to Scripture alone as

the sole infallible authority for faith and life, and the simple and true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Historian Philip Schaff wrote of the Scholastic system of thought: “These theological systems are justly compared with the institution of the medieval papacy, and the creations of the Gothic architecture, imposing, massive, and strongly buttressed. The papacy subjected all kingdoms to its divine authority. Architecture made all materials and known mechanical arts tributary to worship. The Schoolmen used all the forces of logic and philosophy, but they used much wood and straw in their constructions, as the sounder exegesis and more scriptural theology of the Reformers and these later days have shown” (Schaff, Vol. V, pg. 590).

Humanism

An intellectual movement that developed because of the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries. This movement began as a reaction to the traditional academic curriculum of the Scholastic period. The humanist cry was *ad fontes* or “Back to the sources!” to recover the foundation of the Greco-Roman civilization and culture to revitalize Europe and return to the languages, history, rhetoric, logic, and philosophy that made men great and the culture greater. The movement began in Renaissance Italy with a return to pagan classics, but later developed with the harmonization of secular philosophy with Christianity.

The “**Christian Humanist**” in distinction from the mere “Humanist” was one during the 16th century who sought a return to the source of the faith in the Holy Scriptures, discarding the theological errors and speculations of the Scholastic Theology or the Schoolmen. The Christian Humanist desired a return to the essence of Christianity without all the theological confusion, complexity and disagreement of the Late Medieval Period found in the writings of the Schoolmen. Desiderius Erasmus was the “Prince of the Humanists” and he said that theology must return back to the sources and to ancient simplicity. Christian Humanism brought about a renaissance of knowing the biblical languages (which was rare among the Schoolmen, Thomas Aquinas himself, although brilliant, did not have a good working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek) in order to rightly exegete and apply Scripture. This caused the pursuit of collecting faithful manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments and the discipline of textual criticism. Many of the Christian Humanists became publishers with the recent invention of the printing press and were able to disseminate through publication thousands of biblical and secular texts.

Expert on Christian Humanism and Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University Alister McGrath wrote: “Both humanist and Reformer had serious misgivings concerning Scholastic Theology; both wished to return to the Bible, particularly the New Testament, as the source of Christian doctrine; both greatly valued the fathers as witnesses to the vitality and character of early Christianity. This appeared to indicate that both movements possessed a common theological program, and many at the time appear

to have assumed that this was the case....Both humanists and the Reformers were hostile toward Scholastic Theology. The humanists objected to the scholastic emphasis upon abstract ideas, dislocated and detached from their living historical contexts, which seemed to them to represent an unhealthy obsession with universal and religious truths” (*The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, Alister E. McGrath, pg. 43).

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