

Dr. Roger Green, Reformation to the Present, Session 2, Medieval Catholicism Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, Reformation to the Present, Session 2, Medieval Catholicism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Green's lecture provides an introduction to studying theology in his Church History course, emphasizing the importance of focusing on major themes with humility. He highlights the crucial role of theological formulation in church history, noting its connection to historical context and the limitations of human understanding when facing theological mysteries. **The lecture then transitions to outlining key aspects of Medieval Catholicism.** Specifically, it begins to explain the medieval understanding of **sin, differentiating between mortal and venial sins and their consequences.** This sets the stage for discussing **purgatory as a place for baptized believers to work off punishment for sins** and introduces the concept of **penance as a sacrament involving confession, absolution, and assigned works.** Finally, the lecture briefly touches upon **indulgences and the theological concept of works of supererogation** as part of this system of penance, all within the specific context of the medieval Roman Catholic Church.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, Reformation to the Present, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → Reformation to the Present).



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3. Briefing Document: Green, Reformation to the Present, Session 2, Medieval Catholicism

Briefing Document: Medieval Catholicism - Key Themes and Ideas from Dr. Green's Lecture

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Roger Green in the second lecture of his Church History course, focusing on Medieval Catholicism. The lecture aims to paint a theological picture of the Roman Catholic Church in the medieval world, particularly in the context leading up to the Reformation. Dr. Green emphasizes understanding this historical context without necessarily drawing direct connections to contemporary Roman Catholicism.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

I. Introductory Considerations for Studying Theology:

Dr. Green begins by outlining several considerations for approaching theological study throughout the course:

- **Major in the Majors:** The course will focus on significant ideas, events, and people, avoiding getting sidetracked by minor details. He stresses the importance of distinguishing between critical, life-changing theological issues and those of lesser significance.
- **Quote:** "We want to really concentrate on what is major, what is really significant, what is really important. We mentioned ideas, events, and people, and we really want to stick to that and concentrate on that."
- **Spirit of Humility and Reverence:** Theology is complex and should be approached with humility, acknowledging that no one possesses all the answers. St. Augustine is presented as a model of this approach.
- **Quote:** "Because theology is fairly complicated, as we will see in the course, and we should approach it with a lot of humility. None of us have all the answers. That's why we're learning together in the course."
- **Quote (regarding Augustine):** "He wrote a treatise on the Trinity, just as one example, and in his treatise on Trinity, at the end of the treatise, he begs forgiveness, in a sense, for errors he might have made in speaking about the Trinity and so forth."

- **Crucial Formulation of Theology:** Theology has been fundamental in shaping the life and ministry of the Church. People have historically been willing to sacrifice their lives for theological truths. Maximus the Confessor is cited as an example.
- **Quote:** "You can't understand the life and the ministry of the Church unless you understand the theology that has moved it, driven it, motivated it. It's really, really, absolutely critical."
- **Quote (regarding Maximus the Confessor):** "People have literally lived, died, and suffered for the sake of theology."
- **Theology as a Reflection of its Age:** Theology and history have a cyclical relationship. Historical contexts pose questions, and theology offers answers based on scripture and church development. Conversely, theology can also lead and shape historical understanding.
- **Quote:** "Theology, in a sense, is a reflection of the age in which you live. It's a reflection of history. It's a reflection of what is going on in history."
- **Quote:** "Theology answers the questions that the age asks, but on the other hand, theology often asks the question that history needs to answer. So, it's cyclical."
- **Theology and Mystery:** Theology is not an attempt to deny or explain away the mysteries of faith but rather an effort to understand them as much as possible using reason and revelation, while ultimately acknowledging the limits of human comprehension.
- **Quote:** "In this course, I would never want you to think that theology is a denial of mystery. Theology is not a denial of mystery. We stand in awe of the great mysteries of the faith."
- **Quote:** "What theology is, is an attempt to understand as much as we are able to with the minds that God has given us."
- **Theology as More Than Academic:** The course aims to encourage students to personally engage with theological concepts, apply them to their own lives, and develop their own understanding.
- **Quote:** "I hope this course will not just be an academic exercise for you. I hope it will be an exercise of taking the theology that we talk about, applying it to your own life, thinking it through in your own life, your own mind, and working it out in your own life and mind for your own theology."

II. Medieval Roman Catholicism and the Nature of Justification (Focus of Lecture 1/Session 2):

Dr. Green clarifies that the lecture will focus on the theology of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, the context in which figures like Martin Luther emerged, and not on contemporary Roman Catholicism. He aims to construct a theological "puzzle" of this era.

A. The Nature of Sin:

Medieval Roman Catholicism distinguished between two types of sin:

- **Mortal Sin:** A "great offense against the law of God," such as breaking one of the Ten Commandments. Mortal sin was believed to kill the soul and lead to eternal punishment. Confession and absolution could prevent eternal damnation, but punishment for the sin still remained.
- **Quote:** "Mortal sin is any great offense against the law of God."
- **Quote:** "It's called a mortal sin because it is the sin that kills you. It's the sin that kills your soul. It's the sin that is going to really send you to eternal punishment."
- **Venial Sin:** "Small and pardonable offenses against God or against our neighbor." Venial sins did not kill the soul or lead to eternal punishment, but they still incurred some punishment.
- **Quote:** "Venial sins were small and pardonable offenses against God or against our neighbor."
- **Quote:** "Technically, I mean technically, venial sins do not kill your soul. Venial sins aren't mortal. They don't send you to eternal punishment."

The Problem of Distinction and Fear: Dr. Green highlights the difficulty in distinguishing between mortal and venial sins at the lay level, as interpretations could vary between local priests. This lack of assurance often led to frequent and extensive confession, exemplified by Martin Luther's six hours of daily confession in the monastery, reflecting a "fear of being a Roman Catholic in that medieval world."

B. The Doctrine of Purgatory:

Purgatory was a significant doctrine in the medieval world:

- **Purpose:** Purgatory was believed to be the place where baptized believers went after death to work off the punishment due to sins committed in their lives, after their original sin was washed away at baptism.
- **Quote:** "Purgatory is where all baptized believers go after they die for a certain period of time, and they're paying the punishment due to the sins that they've committed in this life."
- **Exceptions:** Martyrs were believed to go directly to heaven (their martyrdom being their purgatory), as were exemplary saints like Mary. Higher clergy, especially popes, were also commonly believed to bypass purgatory, which caused resentment among the common people due to the often scandalous lives of some clergy.
- **Biblical Basis (according to Roman Catholicism):** While not based on the Protestant canon, the doctrine was supported by church tradition and passages like 2 Maccabees 12:39-45.
- **Theological Assumption:** The doctrine rested on the assumption that while God forgives sins, He is a God of justice who demands punishment for those sins, both in this life and the next. This view of God would later be scrutinized by the Reformers.
- **Common Understanding of Purgatory:** Ordinary people likely believed:
 1. Their deceased relatives and friends were suffering in purgatory (often imagined as fiery torment).
 2. Those in purgatory could not help themselves.
 3. God would not help them until His justice was satisfied.
 4. Eventually, the living could shorten the time their loved ones spent in purgatory.
- **Papal Authority:** The Pope held significant authority over purgatory, determining the length of sentences and how they could be shortened or remitted entirely. This concentration of power was considered problematic.
- **Quote:** "The person in charge of purgatory and, therefore, of people's lives and of people's destinies is the Pope."
- **Quote:** "The Pope determines the length of sentences. The Pope determines how sentences can be shortened and how people can get out of purgatory. It's all under the jurisdiction of the Pope, one person."

C. Penance:

Penance was understood in two ways:

- **As a Sacrament:** It involved four steps:
 1. Sin
 2. Confession to a priest
 3. Absolution by the priest
 4. Assignment of works of penance by the priest to pay off the temporal punishment due to sin. Failure to perform the assigned penance was considered a mortal sin, trapping individuals in a cycle.
- **As Works Assigned by the Priest:** In common parlance, "penance" often referred specifically to the works the priest assigned.

Purpose of Penance (from the Church's perspective): The church instituted the system of penance with the aim of keeping true believers within the church community and in a state of grace by maintaining their connection through confession and prescribed actions.

Examples of Assigned Penance: Dr. Green provides examples of common penances:

- Fasting
- Giving alms in the name of Christ
- Works of mercy (among the sick and poor)
- Prayer (reciting specific prayers)
- Patiently suffering through illnesses and hardships (without railing against God)

D. Indulgences (Introduction):

Indulgences are introduced as a crucial aspect of penance and will be the subject of a later lecture. An indulgence is defined as "a remission of a certain amount of time in purgatory," a lessening of the time required to work off punishment. The system of indulgences became a primary means of penance in the later medieval period.

E. Works of Supererogation (Related to Penance):

Dr. Green explains the concept of "works of supererogation" within the medieval worldview:

- **Definition:** These are excess merits performed by saints and martyrs (who went directly to heaven and didn't need these merits for their own salvation), stored in a "treasury" in heaven.
- **Quote:** "Works of supererogation are excess merits that the saints perform, and these excess merits are performed by the saints and martyrs are stored up in heaven in a treasury."
- **Application:** Priests were believed to be able to draw from this treasury of merits and apply them to the lives of penitents who had confessed and received absolution. This could help reduce their time of penance and ultimately shorten their time in purgatory.
- **Literal Belief:** In the medieval mindset, this was taken as a literal truth, a form of spiritual accounting.

Conclusion:

Dr. Green concludes the lecture by emphasizing that the discussion pertains to the historical context of medieval Roman Catholicism and encourages students to reflect on the stark differences compared to the modern world. The concepts of sin, purgatory, penance, and the emerging system of indulgences form a complex theological framework that will be further explored in subsequent lectures leading up to the Reformation.

4. Study Guide: Green, Reformation to the Present, Session 2, Medieval Catholicism

Study Guide: Medieval Catholicism

Key Concepts

- **Major in the Majors:** The principle of focusing on the most significant ideas, events, and people in theological study.
- **Humility in Theology:** The importance of approaching theological discussions with a recognition of the complexity of the subject and the limitations of individual understanding.
- **Crucial Formulation of Theology:** The understanding that theological development has been essential in shaping the life and ministry of the Church.
- **Theology as a Reflection of History:** The idea that theological questions and answers are often intertwined with the historical context in which they arise.
- **Theology and Mystery:** The concept that while theology seeks understanding, it does not negate the inherent mysteries of the faith.
- **Medieval Roman Catholicism:** The specific theological and structural framework of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, the context in which the Reformation emerged.
- **Nature of Sin (Medieval View):** The categorization of sin into mortal and venial sins, each with different consequences and requirements for absolution and punishment.
- **Mortal Sin:** A grave offense against God's law that, if unconfessed and unabsolved, leads to eternal damnation. It also incurs temporal punishment.
- **Venial Sin:** A minor and pardonable offense against God or neighbor that does not result in eternal damnation but still carries temporal punishment.
- **Purgatory:** A state after death for baptized believers who have not fully expiated their venial sins or the temporal punishment due to mortal sins. It is a process of purification before entering heaven.
- **Penance (Sacrament):** A sacrament in the medieval Catholic Church involving contrition, confession to a priest, absolution by the priest, and the performance of works assigned by the priest to satisfy the temporal punishment for sins.

- **Penance (Lay Understanding):** Often understood by laypeople primarily as the specific works assigned by a priest to atone for sins.
- **Indulgences:** The remission of temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven. In the medieval period, these could be granted by the Church (often by the Pope) for various reasons.
- **Works of Supererogation:** Excess meritorious works performed by saints and martyrs that were believed to be stored in a "treasury of merits" in heaven, from which the Church could draw upon to grant indulgences or apply to the benefit of others.

Short Answer Quiz

1. According to Dr. Green, what should be the primary focus when studying theology in this course?
2. Why does Dr. Green emphasize the importance of humility when discussing theology? Provide an example he uses to illustrate this point.
3. Explain the cyclical relationship between history and theology as described in the lecture.
4. Describe the medieval Roman Catholic understanding of mortal sin, including its consequences and the prescribed remedy.
5. What was the distinction between mortal and venial sins in medieval Catholic theology, and what was a practical challenge in discerning between them for laypeople?
6. Explain the doctrine of purgatory in medieval Catholicism and its purpose for believers after death.
7. According to the lecture, what were some exceptions to the general belief that all believers would go to purgatory?
8. Outline the four steps of the sacrament of penance as described in the lecture.
9. What was the positive reason, according to the lecture, behind the medieval Church's establishment of the system of penance?
10. What are works of supererogation, and how did they function within the medieval Catholic system of penance and indulgences?

Answer Key

1. Dr. Green states that the primary focus when studying theology in this course should be to "major in the majors," concentrating on what is truly significant and important, including major ideas, events, and people. This helps to avoid getting sidetracked by minor details.
2. Dr. Green emphasizes humility in theology because it is a complex subject, and no one possesses all the answers. He uses St. Augustine as an example, noting that even this prolific theologian humbly begged forgiveness for potential errors in his treatise on the Trinity, serving as a model for approaching theological study.
3. The lecture describes the relationship between history and theology as cyclical. History asks the questions prompted by the events and context of the time, and theology provides answers based on the Bible and church tradition. Conversely, theology can also raise questions that history then needs to address.
4. In medieval Roman Catholic theology, mortal sin was defined as any great offense against the law of God that kills the soul and leads to eternal punishment if not confessed and absolved. The remedy was confession to a priest, which would absolve the guilt but not necessarily eliminate the temporal punishment.
5. Mortal sins were considered great offenses leading to eternal damnation, while venial sins were small and pardonable offenses not resulting in spiritual death. A practical challenge for laypeople was that the line between them was not always clear, with different priests potentially categorizing the same actions differently.
6. Purgatory was believed to be a place where baptized believers went after death to work off the punishment due to sins committed in their lifetime before being able to enter heaven. It was a process of purging or purification to satisfy God's justice.
7. According to the lecture, exceptions to going to purgatory included martyrs for the faith (whose martyrdom served as their purgatory), saints who lived exemplary lives (like Mary), and often higher clergy like popes, who were sometimes believed to go directly to heaven.
8. The four steps of the sacrament of penance were: first, committing sin; second, confessing those sins to a priest; third, receiving absolution from the priest; and fourth, being assigned and performing works of penance to pay off the punishment attached to the sins.

9. The lecture suggests that the positive reason behind the system of penance was the Church's desire to keep true believers within the bosom of the Church and in a state of grace. By requiring confession and works, it ensured a continuous connection with the Church and its community.
10. Works of supererogation were understood as excess merits performed by saints and martyrs, which were stored in a heavenly treasury. The Church, and particularly priests, could draw upon these merits to apply them to the lives of penitents, helping to reduce their time in purgatory or fulfill their penance.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the interconnectedness of the medieval Roman Catholic doctrines of sin, purgatory, and penance. How did each concept rely on and reinforce the others within the theological framework?
2. Analyze the power dynamics inherent in the medieval Catholic understanding of purgatory and the role of the Pope. What implications did this have for the lives and faith of medieval Christians?
3. Compare and contrast the theological understanding of penance as a sacrament with the common layperson's understanding of penance. What factors might have contributed to these differing perspectives?
4. Evaluate the significance of the medieval Roman Catholic view of sin (mortal and venial) in shaping religious practice and the need for the sacrament of penance.
5. Consider the potential impact of the doctrine of works of supererogation on the medieval understanding of salvation and the role of the Church. How might this doctrine have influenced popular piety and the authority of the clergy?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Absolution:** The act by which a priest, in the sacrament of penance, declares the forgiveness of sins to a penitent who confesses and shows contrition.
- **Canon (Biblical):** The official list of books recognized as divinely inspired Scripture by a particular religious tradition (in this context, contrasting Catholic and Protestant views).
- **Christology:** The branch of Christian theology concerned with the nature and person of Jesus Christ.

- **Dogma:** A central truth of the Catholic faith, defined by the Magisterium (the Church's teaching authority), which is binding on all believers.
- **Expiate:** To make amends or atone for sin or wrongdoing.
- **Justification by Faith:** A central tenet of Protestantism, emphasizing that salvation is received through faith in Jesus Christ alone, apart from works of the law.
- **Layperson:** A member of a church who is not ordained as clergy.
- **Magisterium:** The teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church, vested in the Pope and the bishops in communion with him.
- **Martyr:** A person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs.
- **Original Sin:** The state of sin that humanity inherited from the first sin of Adam and Eve.
- **Papacy:** The office and authority of the Pope as the bishop of Rome and head of the Roman Catholic Church.
- **Prolegomenon:** A critical or historical introduction or preliminary discussion, often to a larger work.
- **Reformation:** A 16th-century movement for the reform of abuses in the Roman Catholic Church, leading to the establishment of the Protestant churches.
- **Sacrament:** In Christian theology, a visible sign instituted by Christ to impart grace. The Catholic Church recognizes seven sacraments.
- **Temporal Punishment:** Punishment due to sin that is not eternal and can be expiated in this life or in purgatory.
- **The Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God exists as three co-equal and co-eternal persons: Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit.
- **Treatise:** A formal and systematic exposition in writing of some subject.

5. FAQs Green, Reformation to the Present, Session 2, Medieval Catholicism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Medieval Catholicism

1. What was the primary focus of theological study in the context of this lecture on Medieval Catholicism? The primary focus, according to Dr. Green's introductory remarks, is to "major in the majors." This means concentrating on the most significant ideas, events, and people in theology and Church history, distinguishing between matters of critical, life-changing importance and those of lesser significance. The lecture itself then immediately delves into describing the theology of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, particularly as it pertains to sin and justification, as a necessary backdrop for understanding the Reformation.

2. What was the medieval Roman Catholic understanding of sin, and what distinction was made? The medieval Roman Catholic Church divided sin into two categories: mortal sin and venial sin. Mortal sin was defined as any great offense against the law of God, such as breaking one of the Ten Commandments. It was believed to kill the soul and lead to eternal punishment. Venial sin, on the other hand, was considered a small and pardonable offense against God or neighbor that did not kill the soul or lead to eternal damnation, though it still carried punishment.

3. How did the concepts of confession and punishment relate to mortal sin in medieval Catholicism? While mortal sins were believed to lead to eternal punishment, confession to a priest was the prescribed means of absolution, preventing eternal damnation. However, even after confession and absolution, the medieval understanding held that punishment was still due for the mortal sin committed. This punishment was believed to need to be worked off both in this life and in the afterlife.

4. What was the doctrine of purgatory in medieval Roman Catholicism, and what purpose did it serve? Purgatory was believed to be a place where baptized believers went after death to undergo purification by paying the temporal punishment due for sins committed during their lives. It was not considered hell, but rather a temporary state where believers were "purged" before being able to enter heaven. Exceptions were made for martyrs and exemplary saints like Mary, who were believed to go directly to heaven.

5. What were some of the key beliefs held by the average medieval Roman Catholic regarding purgatory? Average believers generally thought that their deceased relatives and friends were suffering in purgatory and were incapable of helping themselves. They also believed that God's justice needed to be satisfied before these souls could be released. However, they also held onto the hope that the living could eventually shorten the time their loved ones spent in purgatory through certain actions.

6. What was the sacrament of penance in the medieval Roman Catholic Church, and what steps did it involve? As a sacrament, penance involved four steps: first, committing sin; second, confessing those sins to a priest; third, receiving absolution from the priest; and fourth, being assigned and performing works of penance by the priest to pay off the temporal punishment for the sins. These assigned works were considered obligatory, and failure to perform them could itself be considered a mortal sin.

7. What were some examples of the works of penance assigned in medieval Catholicism? Common works of penance included fasting, giving alms to the poor, performing works of mercy for the sick and poor, and prayer (such as reciting the Lord's Prayer a certain number of times). Additionally, "patient suffering" in the face of illness and hardship was also considered a form of penance. The system of indulgences also became a primary means of penance.

8. What were "works of supererogation" and how did they function within the medieval Catholic system of penance and purgatory? Works of supererogation were understood as excess merits performed by saints and martyrs (like Mary) that were not needed for their own salvation. These merits were believed to be stored in a "treasury" in heaven. Medieval Catholic priests could, in theory, draw upon this treasury and apply these excess merits to the lives of those confessing sin, helping them in their penance and potentially lessening their time in purgatory.