

The Origins and Theology of Historic Roman Catholicism

We are taking a very brief hiatus from our study of the Holy Scriptures to address several topics broached by our class and answered through a combination of Holy Scriptures and the context of their development. We begin with the development and the cardinal, pivotal teaching of Roman Catholicism around which their instruction to participants is based.

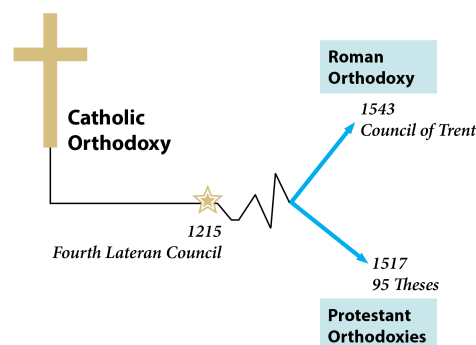
Preliminary Assumptions

1. Both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism emerged in their classical or dogmatic expressions only in the sixteenth century.
2. Both traditions in the sixteenth century reflected a concerted attempt at reforming a decadent church.
3. Both claimants assert that they alone truly reflect the teachings of the first sixteen centuries of the church and are, therefore, apostolic.
4. However, the first sixteen centuries support the teachings of both traditions. By this I mean that the historical record is “a spotted leopard.” You can find just about any teaching as the centuries evolved. This is why Protestants prioritize Holy Scripture over our teachers (or at least seek to do so).

The First Sixteen Centuries and Roman Catholicism

1. The great issues that the early church grappled with are generally embraced by both traditions.
 - a. The persecution of the church within the Roman Empire ended in the fourth century under Constantine and Theodosius I, the former granted the church legitimacy of existence and the latter religious supremacy, the sole religion of the empire. Churches could formally meet, buildings were constructed, and leaders could assemble to address issues.
 - b. In the fourth and fifth centuries the church struggled to articulate and explain its beliefs in a hostile world and divided religious consensus.
 - 1) The doctrine of the Holy Trinity of God (Nicene Creed [325], Constantinople Creed [381]).

A Protestant View of Church History



- 2) The doctrine of the theanthropic Christ (the incarnate of God in human appearance (Chalcedonian Creed, 451)
 - 3) Importantly, the bishops of the church sought to defend the Faith from false teachings. In doing so, they answered only points of dispute needing clarification summary of all of Christian belief. The first systematic attempt was that of John of Damascus in the 8th century. The Bible did not drop out of heaven in one instance, nor did it have a theological index attached.
- c. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the church struggled with the weakening and collapse of the Roman Empire. Amid the cultural, social, and political chaos, the church became an increasingly stabilizing force and remained so for centuries.

More to the point the church assumed more authority seeming to help by building a fortress of protections. The church became the “savior” of God’s people; it gradually promised only what God in grace could accomplish. In 603, the bishop of Rome assumed religious authority over Western Europe claiming to be the papal legate in succession of Peter taking the title “Pontifex Maximus” (once used only of Roman emperors). The first pope to claim supremacy over conduct and teaching of all the churches was Gregory I. While we would disagree with some of this thought, he was Orthodox in his understanding of the person and accomplishments of Jesus (writing a defense of substitutionary atonement) and unmerited grace (he followed the best of Augustine).

d. The Late Medieval Period and the Church

- 1) The dominate influence of Augustine (d. 430), heralded as one of the most influential churchmen in Christendom which continues to this day. Foremost among the controversies of his day was the teachings in Rome of Pelagius (d. ca 420), who taught a moral understanding of entrance into the Kingdom of God (the issues always being the meaning of sin that is in mankind and the grace needed to overcome it).

Augustine strenuously responded with several treatises, stating what we believe reflects the witness of Holy Scripture.

The church gathered at Synod of Orange (529) rendering the verdict that Augustine was

correct and Pelagius was excommunicated (though deceased). Sadly, the council was not universal (attended by all the bishops) and, therefore, did not receive universal recognition.

The Anthropology of Augustine

Sin corrupts man’s

- mind
- emotion
- will

He is spiritually dead.

Plenary Inability
Total Depravity



2) The church gradually shifted away from the Synod of Orange to adopt a compromise position between Augustine and Pelagius called Cassianism, a teaching of the monastic John Cassian.

3) The attempt to be helpful took unwise turns perhaps reaching a pinnacle of overstatement when Boniface VIII (1302) declared that there was not salvation outside the church (an accepted view) but added that there was no

John Cassian and Cooperative Grace

Sin hinders man's:

—Mind—
—Emotion—
—Will—

He needs help



Causative
Cooperative Ability

Denial of Total
Corruption
(Deprivation, Not
Depravity)

Chart 89

salvation outside himself. At the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) the church declared the Lord's Table as revisiting the first death of Christ resulting in sacramental forgiveness (venial sins).

4) This brings us to the 15th and 16th centuries and the mounting criticism of the church's waywardness. That waywardness necessitated addressing, but because there was not agreement as to the depth of the problem or the solution, division resulted.

e. The Roman Catholic Church stated its claim to be the original form of Faith (arguing that Protestants were creators of novelty [distorted the past] and heretical). The Church formulated its claim to Orthodoxy at the Council of Trent (1546-1563) and updated it in the recent *Catechism of the Church* (1994). Where do we begin? The fundamental issues, though there are many ancillary ones, is the doctrine of salvation.

1) The rise of the Renaissance, the emergence of nation-states, the rise of the universities raised a question: it was not "what do we believe?" But how can we demonstrate that what we believe is true (Scholasticism)?

a) Anselm and Aquinas gave us arguments for the existence of God. Anselm gave us one of the most brilliant defenses of the Atonement ("Why the God Man").

b) The root dogmatic, contemporary Roman Catholic teaching concerning the acquisition of redemption is the point of contrast to Protestant belief. The source is found in two men, Peter Lombard (1110-1160) who wrote *The Sentences*, and Thomas Aquinas (1274 d.) *The Summa of Knowledge*.

c) The Catholic formulation is quite Orthodox in several ways: the absolute deity of Christ (including the incarnation, death on the cross, and the resurrection), the atoning mercies of Christ, and salvation initiated by divine grace. How is this explained?

The Accomplishments of Christ: A Treasury of Merit

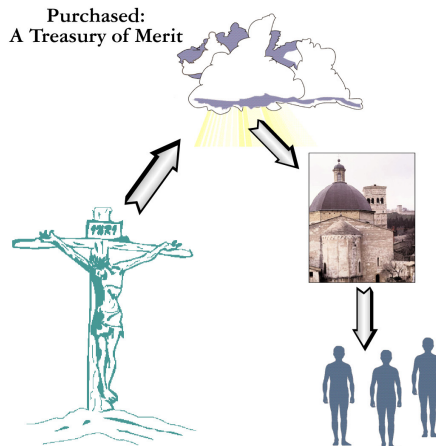


Chart 136

Peter Lombard: The Seven Sacraments as a Means of Grace

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Eucharist
4. Penance
5. Unction
6. Orders
7. Matrimony



Peter Lombard: The Seven Sacraments Explained

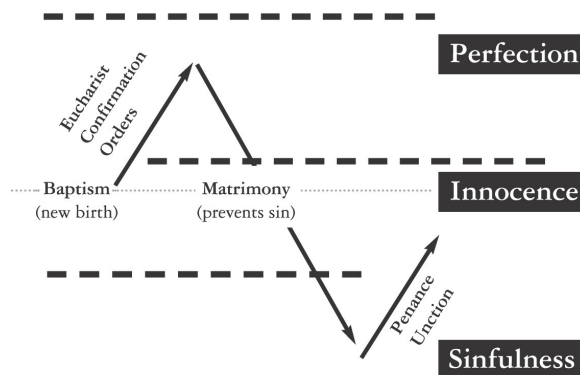
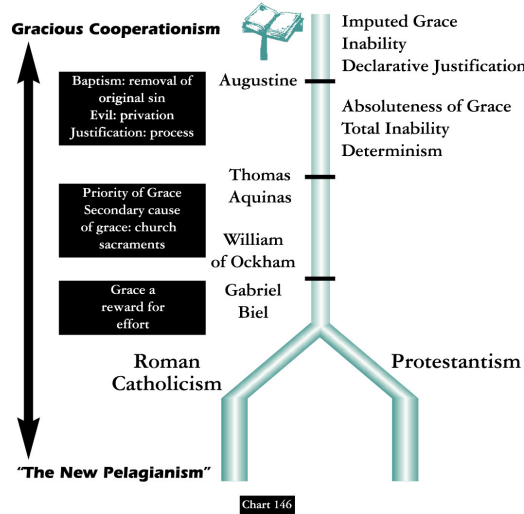


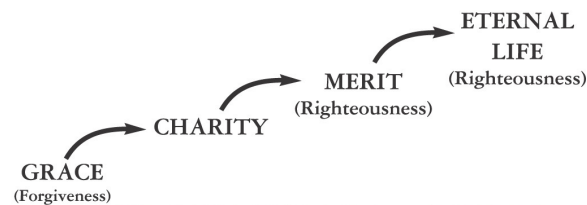
Chart 135

- f. To be fair, we must say that Augustine did contribute to Roman Catholicism in that he blended justification with sanctification making salvation progressive, promoting an interim state called Purgatory, and defining evil as absence of righteousness. This is why Catholic and Protestant theologians embrace him.

The Reformation Traditions: Different Views of the Past



Thomas Aquinas: Divine Redemption and Merit



"The meriting of eternal life depends principally on charity."

"Our merit is the secondary cause."

"A man merits an increase of grace by each and every meritorious action."

"He cannot merit the first grace."

Chart 138

Thomas Aquinas and Justification: Forgiveness without Righteousness

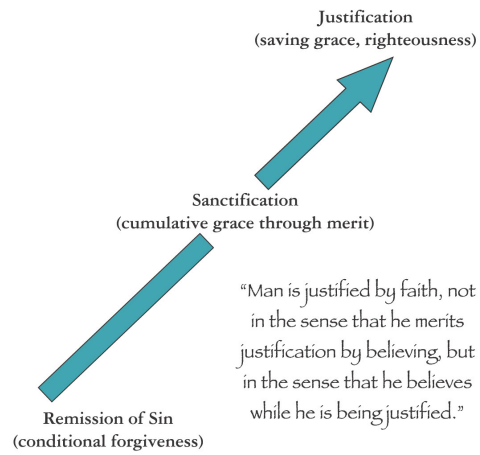


Chart 139

Thomas Aquinas and Merit through an Increase of Grace

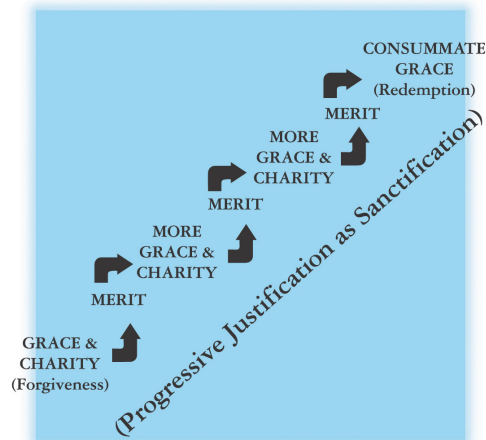


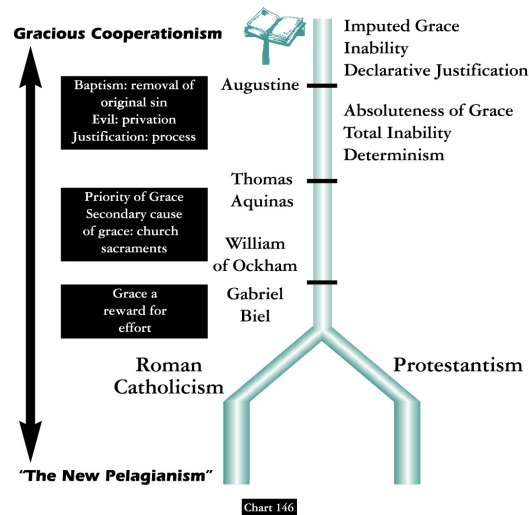
Chart 137

The Importance of Thomas Aquinas in the Roman Catholic Tradition

“St. Thomas Aquinas may be said to have been present at all the Ecumenical Councils of the Church after his time, presiding as it were, by his invisible presence and his living teachings over their deliberations and decrees; but that greatest and most special honor was given to the Angelic Doctor at the Council of Trent, when, during its sessions, together with the Bible and the formal decrees of the Sovereign Pontiffs, the Fathers of the Council had the open *Summa* placed upon the altar so that thence they might draw counsels, arguments, and oracles. This was a singular honor and praise accorded to St. Thomas which was not given to any of the Fathers or other Doctors of the Church.”

Pope Leo XIII
August 4, 1879
Encyclical Aeterni Patris

The Reformation Traditions: Different Views of the Past



Thoughts:

1. Every error finds its roots in a failure to understand the accomplishments of Christ on the cross.
2. Every error begins with an inadequate understanding of what mankind is capable of accomplishing.
3. In judging another's Christian beliefs major on the fundamental areas of disagreement, the cross.