

Roman Catholic Theology Regarding Sin

Two Types of Sin

- Mortal—Dying without absolution will send one to Hell for eternity.
 - It involves a “grave matter” (e.g., a violation of the Ten Commandments).
 - It is committed with full knowledge.
 - It is committed with deliberate & complete consent.
- Venial (“Forgivable”)—Dying without absolution will require further “purging” before entering Heaven.
 - It involves something not of a “grave matter.”
 - It is committed without full knowledge.
 - It is committed without deliberate & complete consent.

Two Mechanisms of Absolution (Forgiveness)

- Sacrament of Baptism—Affects only those sins committed prior to baptism.
- Sacrament of Penance—Affects only those sins committed after baptism.
 - The sinner (penitent) confesses the sin to a priest (confessor).
 - An act of penance is assigned (prayer, fasting, charitable giving, or some combination thereof).
 - Absolution is granted contingent upon the penitent accomplishing the assigned act of penance.
- These Sacraments are only effective when administered in accordance with canon law, by priests serving under the authority of a bishop and, ultimately, the Pope.

Indulgences Permitted “Blanket” Absolution of Confessed Sins

- Earliest example—Absolution when unusual circumstances did not permit the confessor & penitent to interact (e.g., Christians awaiting martyrdom without a priest present)
- Around the 10th Century indulgences via prayers, charitable donations, pilgrimages, etc. were popularly connected with lessening temporal punishment after death (“purgatory”) for oneself & for those relatives or friends who were already dead.
- Pope Urban II granted full absolution to those who participated in what is now called the “First Crusade” (AD 1095-1099).
- Throughout the next several centuries, certificates of indulgence became a popular form of fundraising, both by agents of the Roman Catholic Church & by unauthorized individuals taking advantage of people’s desire to gain absolution for themselves or their loved ones by selling bogus certificates.

The Effect of Roman Catholic Practices Upon Scripture Reading

- From well before the Middle Ages, all Roman Catholic Church ceremonies were performed in Latin.
- The Latin Vulgate was the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for over a 1000 years (AD 400-1530).
- Very few common people in the Middle Ages understood spoken Latin, let alone read it.

Interaction of Politics & Religion During the Middle Ages

- The Papacy asserted that it “possessed both an earthly and heavenly *imperium*, a royal priesthood.”
 - Popes crowned Emperors, King & Queens and appointed lesser members of the European aristocracy.
 - Roman Catholic priests, being “educated,” were often placed in positions of secular authority, “advising” European royalty & the aristocracy on behalf of the Pope.
- The Emperor and the European royals & aristocracy often controlled Roman Catholic appointments.
 - They sometimes backed different candidates for Pope, based on their own interests, resulting in quite a few “antipopes” during this period.
 - The appointment of clerics to powerful positions of secular authority were often “sold” to the highest bidder, a practice called “simony.”
- Not everyone approved of this mixture of Church & State.

The Waldenses (12th-15th Centuries)

Probably named after Peter Waldo (c. 1140 - c. 1218), a French merchant at Lyon, who, around 1173, gave away his wealth and began preaching a very simple gospel, without Church approval. He also commissioned (or possibly did it himself) a local language translation of the Latin Bible to use in this preaching.

His followers, the Waldenses, were dedicated to:

- The Bible as the sole rule of faith & practice.
- Preaching from the Bible, in the local language of the people, without any authorization from or ordination by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

They rejected:

- Absolute Papal authority.
- Infant baptism & Transubstantiation.
- Indulgences, purgatory & prayers for the dead.
- Adoration of the saints & relics.

The Church responded by declaring them heretics & persecuting them with the assistance of the State.



Some Environmental Impacts upon the Middle Ages

- **The Start of “The Little Ice Age” (c. 1300)**
 - Weather changes led to a “great famine” (1315-1322), which precipitated starvation & violence.
 - The Church & State seemed powerless to alleviate all the suffering.
- **“The Black Death” (Peaking in Europe during 1347-1350)**
 - Originated in the Orient (China) & was brought back to Europe (Italy) by traders who were present at the Mongol siege of Caffa, Crimea, where infected corpses were catapulted over the walls.
 - The plague killed 75-200 million Europeans (30-60% of the European population).
 - Unaffected Jewish communities were accused of causing the plague & were massacred in many cities.
 - Once again, the Church & State seemed incapable of alleviating all the suffering.

John Wycliffe (c. 1328 - 1384)

“The Morning Star of the Reformation” An English Theologian at Oxford

He objected to:

- Priestly/Church rule in secular matters.
- Church wealth.
- The practice of enriching the Church via indulgences.
- The unquestioned supremacy of the Pope.
- Transubstantiation.

His solutions:

- Provide the people with an English translation of the Scriptures (using the Latin Vulgate & not Hebrew and Greek manuscripts).
 - N.T. completed around 1380 (by himself & associates).
 - O.T. completed 1382 (by Nicholas of Hereford).
 - This was “cleaned up” by John Purvey, beginning in 1382.
- Send out poor preachers, two-by-two, to preach from these English Scriptures. These were later known as “Lollards” (an apparent slur referring either to their poverty or their uneducated preaching style).



Some Significant Documents of the Period

The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards

(Written around 1395)

Summary of Conclusions:

1. The English Church was following Rome's pattern of "temporality" (secular rule), which was wrong.
2. The Roman Catholic priesthood had been compromised by sinful persons.
3. That the priesthood was full of "sodomites" (homosexuals) due to its requirements of celibacy.
4. That the host of the Eucharist (the bread) doesn't literally become the body of Christ during Mass.
5. That priestly promotion of exorcisms & "hallowings" (veneration of saints & their relics) was tantamount to necromancy.
6. That there should be a clear separation between Church & State; specifically that priests should not serve in public office.
7. That accepting money to make prayers on behalf of the dead was wrong.
8. That veneration of the "Rood" (The Crucifix) & other such symbols connected with the crucifixion of Christ was basically idolatry.
9. That the priests (and the Pope) were using the Sacrament of Confession to control people.
10. That indulgences were being given to ungodly men so that they might wage unjust wars.
11. That mandatory celibacy among nuns was resulting in infanticide, abortion, lesbianism & bestiality.
12. That the Church was supporting all sorts of unnecessary craftsmen (e.g., goldsmiths & armor makers).

De Heretico Comburendo ("Heretic Burning")

This was an English statute, proposed by the Church and enacted by Parliament & King Henry IV in 1401 which targeted the Lollard movement.

"Yet, nevertheless, divers false and perverse people of a certain new sect, of the faith of the sacraments of the church, and the authority of the same damnably thinking and against the law of God and of the Church usurping the office of preaching, do perversely and maliciously in divers places within the said realm, under the color of dissembled holiness, preach and teach these days openly and privily divers new doctrines, and wicked heretical and erroneous opinions contrary to the same faith and blessed determinations of the Holy Church, and of such sect and wicked doctrine and opinions they make unlawful conventicles and confederacies, they hold and exercise schools, they make and write books, they do wickedly instruct and inform people, and as such they may excite and stir them to sedition and insurrection, and make great strife and division among the people, and other enormities horrible to be heard daily do perpetrate and commit subversion of the said catholic faith and doctrine of the Holy Church, in diminution of divine Worship, and also in destruction of the estate, rights, and liberties of the said Church of England;"

The statute called for such heretics to be tried and condemned by the Church, and then to be burned at the stake by the State.

Constitutions of Oxford

Issued in 1408 by Thomas Arundel, the Archbishop of Canterbury

Among other things, it:

- Required that all preachers be licensed by the Church.
- Forbade anyone without a M.A. or B.A. to teach children about the Sacraments.
- Forbade the reading of anything written by John Wycliffe.
- Forbade the translation of "Holy Scripture" (i.e., the Latin Vulgate) into English.
- Forbade opposition to the anything determined by the "Holy Church" (i.e., the Roman Catholic Church).

John Huss (c. 1369 - 1415)
A Czech Theologian at Prague

He was influenced by Wycliffe, translating his work into Czech. He wanted to see a general reformation of the Church.

- A liturgy performed in the language of the local people.
- That priests should be allowed to marry.
- That indulgences & the belief in “purgatory” should end.

Interesting Quote: “One pays for confession, for mass, for the sacrament, for indulgences, for churching a woman, for a blessing, for burials, for funeral services and prayers. The very last penny which an old woman has hidden in her bundle for fear of thieves or robbery will not be saved. The villainous priest will grab it.”

Huss was burned at the stake when he refused to recant.



**Definitive Action Was Taken by the Church & State
To Quell This Growing Rebellion Against Rome**

Council of Constance (Konstanz, Germany)

- 4 May 1415—Posthumously condemned Wycliffe. Ordered all copies of his writings burned. Ordered that his remains be exhumed, burned & thrown into a nearby river (which was finally carried out in 1428).
- 6 July 1415—Burned John Huss at the stake, having convicted him as a heretic.