

## The Roman Catholic Church

The Middle Ages are full of different strands of thought within the church, but that begins to change as the Roman Catholic Church begins to consolidate. Much of what we think of as the “Roman Catholic Church” becomes set in stone at the Council of Trent (1548), which was itself a reaction to the Protestant Reformation.

The seven sacraments of the Roman church are essentially soul care within Tridentine Catholicism.

These sacraments are how individuals receive grace. Don’t miss this – keep an eye out. These rituals all give grace to the person and in so doing advance the soul.

- 1) Baptism cleansed one from the original guilt of Adam’s sin and the corresponding sin nature.

If any one denies, that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the **guilt of original sin is remitted; or even asserts that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away;** but says that it is only rased (sic), or not imputed; let him be anathema.

- Council of Trent, *Concerning Original Sin*, First Decree, 5.

- 2) Confirmation strengthened and imparted power to the believer to live the Christian life.
- 3) The Eucharist provided strength and power to hold one back from daily faults.
- 4) Extreme Unction cleared the conscience, steadied the soul against the devil, and prepared one for death.
- 5) Penance effected the remission of sins and served as a restraint upon sinful actions and desires.

There are required three acts in the penitent...contrition, confession, and satisfaction... [T]hese satisfactory punishments greatly **recall from sin, and check as it were with a bridle, and make penitents more cautious and watchful for the future; they are also remedies for the remains of sin, and, by acts of the opposite virtues, they remove the habits acquired by evil living.**

- Council of Trent, *On the Most Holy Penance and Extreme Unction*, First Canons, Canon IV and First Decree, Chapter 8.

- 6) Holy Orders gave grace to those ordained to perform their duties.
- 7) Matrimony imparted grace to individuals to live as husband and wife.

When you look at the whole picture of what the sacraments did for the soul, you begin to see how the soul was seen as being cared for within the Catholic church.

(1) Institutionalization.

The movement for soul care has transitioned from being a product of the people of the church to the institution of the church. Each of these sacraments is possessed by the church and administered to the people. It's top-down. They are also unavailable outside of the Roman church. There is no salvation outside the church of Rome because the seven sacraments are unavailable outside the church of Rome.

(2) Ritualization

The majority of these sacraments are *ex opere operato*. The sacrament imparts grace, creating what is necessary inside the individual. People benefit simply by partaking in it.

(3) Generalization

These sacraments have moved from the penitential model of a one-to-one correlation with sin/response to a cyclical model. The Baptism, the Eucharist, etc. happen on a schedule. The one exception is confession which must happen at least once a year. Individuals could go more, but once a year was an acceptable practice.

## Reformation

### 3: The Reformation Church

The public flashpoint of the Reformation occurs as Martin Luther glues a document (written in Latin) to the front door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther wants to talk about abuses within the Roman sacramental system – and much of that related to the nature of penance. Realize this – the Reformation started over soul care issues.

Look at the first three of the 95 Theses:

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said "Repent", willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
  2. This word cannot be understood to mean the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
  3. Yet it does not mean inward repentance only; for there is no inward repentance that does not produce outwardly various mortifications of the flesh.
- Martin Luther, "95 Theses," available in the public domain at Mongerism.  
<https://www.monergism.com/95-theses-martin-luther-ebook>

Martin Luther's rediscovery of the gospel of Jesus Christ actually began with personal trouble regarding the distance between repentance and the sacrament of penance. In confession an individual would confess their sins to the priest, who would then declare, "I absolve you." The

priest's statement "*Te absolvo*" was considered the mechanism by which sins were actually forgiven.

This troubled Luther, as he was deeply concerned that repentance and forgiveness be properly understood. The equation of repentance (a matter of the heart) with confession and satisfaction (ritual) had an emptying effect on what actually constituted repentance.

Luther is identifying the soul care implications of what we talked about last lecture. When heart is replaced by ritual, hope for actual transformation is drained away because transformation is not required for genuine forgiveness of sin. And Luther realized this lack of transformative power in his own life. How could he know that he had confessed enough?

Look at Thesis 12, where Luther contrasts prior practice with contemporary practice:

12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.

- Martin Luther, "95 Theses," available in the public domain at Monergism.  
<https://www.monergism.com/95-theses-martin-luther-ebook>

Luther is asking the question, "If you're absolved of your sin, why are you forced to pay for your sin? In times past, performing penance preceded the declaration of forgiveness because it was a test to ensure that you were actually repentant."

### *Martin Bucer*

Only 21 years after the publication of the 95 Theses, another work was written that would have a tremendous impact on the care of souls within the church. Martin Bucer (Butz-er), minister of the church at Strasburg, about 200 miles north of Wittenburg. Bucer was originally a monk, and extensively studied Aquinas and Erasmus. He heard Luther at a disputation in 1518 and began describing himself as a "Martinian."

There are three hallmarks that Bucer sees within the Reformed understanding of what constitutes good pastoral care.

#### (1) Ministering the Word of God to the people

And those who have already been brought into the church and his communion are...absolved from all their sins and led and encouraged in all that is good, that they might constantly increase in godliness and grow to a perfect man in Christ so that in both understanding and life no-one should be lacking. Now all this is to be achieved and attained solely through teaching, exhorting, warning, disciplining, comforting, pardoning, and reconciling to the Lord and his church: in other words the proclaiming of the whole word of God.

- Martin Bucer *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, 33

(A) The goal for the regenerate is “increase in godliness...so that in both *understanding* and *life* no one should be lacking.

(B) The main way in which this growth is accomplished is through proclaiming the whole word of God.

(2) Ministering the Word to People as Individuals

[The Holy Spirit] is a faithful Teacher who will not give up until he has led his pupils into all truth. Therefore [the faithful pastor] also looks from house to house, from person to person, to see how his lesson by means of public and general sermons has been received, what they have learned from them, and examines his pupils to see what they have or have to grasped. That has always been his practice in his church; and anyone who does not like it and does not wish to restore it to use does not want the Holy Spirit to teach his church properly...

- Martin Bucer *Concerning the True Care of Souls* 187

3) Treating Particular Cases

While Bucer isn't as thorough as Gregory the Great, he returns to the individualized case studies of Gregory.

**The Puritans**

I commend Mark Decker's *Helpful Truths in Past Places*, as well as Timothy Keller's JBC article "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling" for a more detailed treatment.

More than any other group, the Puritans connected doctrine to matters of practical living and wrote extensively on the topic.

This practice of life is so perfectly reflected in theology that there is no precept of universal truth relevant to living well in domestic morality, political life, or lawmaking which does not rightly pertain to theology.

- William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.1.12  
Quoted in Beeke and Jones, 848-849

Counseling was a recognized category in Puritan theology, referred to as "cases of conscience" or "casuistry" (ka-zhoo-uh-stree). Because the Puritans understood the Scriptures as being the fountain of spiritual life and man's internal problems as being primarily spiritual-theological in nature, they were detailed and exacting in examining the way in which human beings functioned, the dilemmas they faced, and how to mediate those troubles with God's word.

A brief study of Puritan titles shows the importance they placed on the soul. On my shelf I have

*Triumphing Over Sinful Fear* by John Flavel.

Flavel distinguishes between creaturely, religious, and sinful fear. Then he explores the interrelationship between all three and how to overcome sinful fear. (So much deeper than just “don’t be anxious.”)

*The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes

Sibbes writes to those who are hard oppressed in their hearts, downcast, morose, and despairing. He warmly outlines the nature of grace and how it is situated in the context of human struggle. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote that this book itself saved him from burnout and dejection.

*The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs

Burroughs identifies 13 ways in which Christians chafe against their life circumstances and shows how the gospel and Christ’s being for them steadies their hearts in affliction.

The most magnificent work is Baxter’s *Christian Directory*. Words almost fail at the scope of this project. On Christian soldiering:

- Warns on the dangers of the occupation, to make sure that one’s soul is regenerate.
- Ensuring that the cause is good, as robbery and murder are evils.
- Not enjoying killing other human beings, as you are likely sending them to hell. A soldier may of necessity kill, but that does not preclude love to neighbor.
- The necessity of courage, and how some men are unsuited temperamentally to war: “A soldier’s life is unfit for one that dare not die.” To run would be to bring disrepute upon Christ, for he has called you to courage in combat.
- Obedience to commanders and the sovereign powers.
- Detesting mutiny and rebellion.
- Take heed not to fall into drunkenness and sensuality. (Radcliff – bars & strip clubs)
- Not becoming arrogant by victory, as victory can delude one into thinking that one has power. God alone has granted you success.<sup>1</sup>

[The Puritans] loved, lived, and breathed Scripture, relishing the power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word. They regarded the sixty-six books of Scripture as the library of the Holy Spirit that was graciously bequeathed to them. They viewed Scripture as God speaking to them as a father speaks to his children. They saw the Word as truth they could trust in and rest upon for all eternity. They saw it empowered by the Spirit to renew their minds and transform their lives.

- Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, 844.

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory: Christian Politics*, 7.1-12.