

“Credo ut Intelligam”: Medieval Scholasticism
Medieval Church History – Session Fourteen

“The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”
—Proverbs 18:15 NKJV

I. Introduction

- a. Defining Scholasticism
- b. Historical Background and Development
 - i. Education after the Fall of Rome
 - ii. The Carolingian Renaissance
 - 1. Revival of Augustine
 - 2. Revival of Aristotle
 - a. Avicenna (AD 980-1037)
 - b. Averroes (AD 1126-1198)
 - iii. Classical Education
 - 1. *Trivium* (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric)
 - 2. *Quadrivium* (Mathematics, Music, Geometry, Astronomy)
 - iv. University Education (*Lectio, Meditatio, Quæstio*)

II. Major Representatives and Their Contributions

- a. Anselm of Canterbury (d. AD 1109)
 - i. “*Credo ut intelligam*.” (“I believe in order that I might understand.”)
 - ii. *Cur deus homo?* (“Why [Did] God [Become] a Man?”)
 - 1. Penal Substitutionary Atonement
 - 2. The Satisfaction of God’s Justice
 - iii. The Ontological Argument for God’s Existence
 - 1. God is “that than which no greater can be thought.”
 - 2. Criticisms
- b. Peter Abelard (d. AD 1142)
 - i. Contributions
 - 1. Faith
 - 2. Revelation
 - 3. Atonement
 - ii. *Sic et non* (“Yes and No”)
- c. Peter Lombard (d. AD 1160)
 - i. *Sententiæ* (“Sentences”)
 - ii. Lombard’s Refined Method
 - iii. Seven Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church

III. Conclusion

- a. The Influence of Medieval Scholasticism
- b. Criticism and Caution

Whether an oath is more binding than a vow?¹

Objection 1: It would seem that an oath is more binding than a vow. A vow is a simple promise: whereas an oath includes, besides a promise, an appeal to God as witness. Therefore an oath is more binding than a vow.

Objection 2: Further, the weaker is wont to be confirmed by the stronger. Now a vow is sometimes confirmed by an oath. Therefore an oath is stronger than a vow.

Objection 3: Further, the obligation of a vow arises from the deliberation of the mind, as stated above; while the obligation of an oath results from the truth of God Whose testimony is invoked. Since therefore God's truth is something greater than human deliberation, it seems that the obligation of an oath is greater than that of a vow.

On the contrary, A vow binds one to God while an oath sometimes binds one to man. Now one is more bound to God than to man. Therefore a vow is more binding than an oath.

I answer that, The obligation both of vow and of an oath arises from something Divine; but in different ways. For the obligation of a vow arises from the fidelity we owe God, which binds us to fulfil our promises to Him. On the other hand, the obligation of an oath arises from the reverence we owe Him which binds us to make true what we promise in His name. Now every act of infidelity includes an irreverence, but not conversely, because the infidelity of a subject to his lord would seem to be the greatest irreverence. Hence a vow by its very nature is more binding than an oath.

Reply to Objection 1: A vow is not any kind of promise, but a promise made to God; and to be unfaithful to God is most grievous.

Reply to Objection 2: An oath is added to a vow not because it is more stable, but because greater stability results from “two immutable things” [Heb. 6:18].

Reply to Objection 3: Deliberation of the mind gives a vow its stability, on the part of the person who takes the vow: but it has a greater cause of stability on the part of God, to Whom the vow is offered.

Recommended Resources

Asselt, Willem J. van. *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*. Translated by Albert Gootjes. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011; pp. 56-72.

Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity through the Centuries*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. pp. 226-238.

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2015; pp. 128-144.

Letham, Robert. *Systematic Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019; pp. 43-48.

Shelley, Bruce L. *Church History in Plain Language*. 4th ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2013; pp. 194-203.

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 89, Art. 8.