

Classical Canon Law

GRATIAN AND RAYMOND OF PENYAFORT



The *Decretum* and the *Decretals (Liber Extra)* represent the dual pillars of the “Classical Age” of canon law (1140–1234).

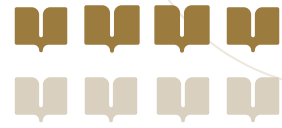
The impetus for this era of legal reform was the Investiture Controversy (1076–1122), a pivotal struggle between church and state. The Holy Roman Empire—that is, secular rulers—asserted the right to appoint clergy, a process known as “lay investiture” that often involved the exchange of money or favors for ecclesiastical positions. It was within this historical context that the term “simony” (*simonia*) first appeared in February 1076.

The *Decretum* and the *Decretals* became the foundational reference points for virtually all subsequent treatments of the subject, whether scholastic, proto-Reformer, Roman Catholic, or Protestant. Even when citing earlier authorities—Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and others—authors often did not quote them precisely, but as transmitted by these two works.

COLLECTION	COMPILER	DATE
<i>Decretum Gratiani</i>	Gratian of Bologna	ca. 1140
<i>Decretales Gregorii IX</i>	Raymond of Penyafort	1234

The Sentences

PETER LOMBARD



The *Sentences* (*Sententiae*) primarily consists of categorized statements collected from church fathers. Completed ca. 1155–57, it became the standard theology textbook of the medieval schools. Through the Middle Ages, theological training in the universities often consisted primarily of lectures on the *Sentences*, and the best theologians produced their own commentaries on it. With over 1,400 known commentaries, it stands as the most frequently analyzed Christian text other than the Bible itself.

Protestants and proto-Reformers objected to this use of the *Sentences* as the primary source of theology rather than Scripture, and, as can be said of most writings of that era, much of its theology was deficient. However, the same figures who cautioned against its elevated status in education still often referenced it positively. Calvin cited Lombard more than a hundred times in his *Institutes* alone. Modern theologians continue to debate the proper understanding of the Lombardian formula that Christ’s atonement is “sufficient for all, but efficient only for the elect.”

Lombard briefly addressed simony in Book 4, Distinction 25. Though his comments were minimal, the *Sentences*’ central role in medieval theology generated substantial written dialogue. Many of the best theological treatments we have on simony come from extended commentaries on that section of his work.

Vice and Virtue

WILLIAM PERALDUS



William Peraldus authored the *Summa virtutum et vitiorum* (Summary of Virtues and Vices; ca. 1236) to systematically categorize moral failings and virtues, guiding both confession and preaching.

Within this work, Peraldus wrote a particularly fiery section on simony, likening it to both leprosy and sodomy. Like the affliction of Gehazi, it plagues all it touches. Like the sin of Sodom, it is fruitless and brings destruction. These were not particularly new or unique observations, but he drew out these analogies more extensively than previous or contemporary writings.

Citing this work, Wycliffe—and Hus, following after him—made the same observations. While Peraldus himself was no proto-Reformer, his writing was particularly influential in fueling the rhetoric of the most important proto-Reformers as they addressed the evils of simony.

Summa theologiae

THOMAS AQUINAS

Aquinas addressed simony at length in his major works, including the *Summa theologiae*, *Commentary on the Sentences*, and various Quodlibets. While he introduced nothing new to the doctrine, he was its most influential student since the writings of Gregory.

In his translation of Wycliffe’s *Treatise on Simony*, Terrence A. McVeigh noted that the proto-Reformer “seem[ed] to have Aquinas’ exposition of the subject before him” because he invoked his wording and thought so frequently.

Registrum epistolarum

GREGORY THE GREAT

Gregory the Great’s correspondence established one of the primary resources for later authors who addressed the sale of spiritual things. At a time when the term simony did not exist, Gregory coined the influential phrase “simoniacal heresy” (*haeresis simoniaca*).

In the Reformed tradition, Gregory is regarded as the last true bishop of Rome. John Calvin cited him second only to Augustine.

Lectures on Genesis

MARTIN LUTHER

Luther wrote about simony throughout his writings, but most clearly and at length in his *Lectures on Genesis*. While he regarded things like indulgences as a form of this sin, it was the sale of preaching and the word of God that for Luther constituted true simony.

Moreover, in these lectures, he identified simony as the heart of all false religion: every rejection of the grace of God is an attempt to exchange our merit for heaven.

The Sentences (ca. 1155–57)

Peter Lombard

Paris, 1508

The Sentences (ca. 1155–57)

Peter Lombard

Lyon, 1540

The Sentences (ca. 1155–57)

Peter Lombard

Lyon, 1618

The Sentences (ca. 1155–57)

Peter Lombard

Cologne, 1566

Decretum (ca. 1140)

Gratian

Paris, 1516

Decretales (1234)

Raymond of Penyafort

Antwerp, 1570

Decretales (1234)

Raymond of Penyafort

Lyon, 1528

Summa virtutum et vitiorum (ca. 1236)

William Peraldus

Mainz, 1618

Summa theologia (ca. 1271)

Thomas Aquinas

Paris, 1846

Registrum epistolarum (590–604)

Gregory the Great

Berlin, 1891

Lectures on Genesis (1535–1545)

Martin Luther

St. Louis, 1955

Tracts and Treatises

John Wycliffe

ed. Robert Vaughan · London, 1845

Matthew's Bible (Tyndale)

2 Kings 5:18–27, Gehazi's Curse • 1549

Geneva Bible

Matthew 10:8, "Freely give" • 1577

Geneva Bible

2 Kings 5:1–26, Gehazi's Sin • 1597

King James Bible

Acts 8:9–24, Simon Magus • 1614

A Compleat History of the Holy Bible (1716)

Engraving, John Sturt

Naaman Cleansed

Foxe's Acts and Monuments (1563)

Engraving, Cassell edition

John Wycliffe • ca. 1860

Foxe's Acts and Monuments (1563)

Engraving, Cassell edition

Jan Hus · ca. 1860