Medieval Church History – Table of Contents (tentative)

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Session 1: **The Kingdom of God on Earth**

Text Reading: **Matthew 16:17 - 19**

"This idea of a Holy Roman Empire and a Holy Catholic Church was a grand and impressive one and was probably never lost sight of, even in times of most complete disintegration."
(Albert Henry Newman)

By the turn of the seventh 'Christian' century, the primary doctrinal battles of the faith had been fought and, generally, won by biblical orthodoxy. Athanasius had staunchly defended the deity of Jesus Christ, and Leo's Tome firmly established the reality of the two natures in the one Man, Christ Jesus. The great Augustine deepened the Church's doctrine in much the same manner as the Apostle Paul deepened the theology of the New Testament. These great lights had burned brightly and flickered out, and another five hundred years would pass before another theologian – Anselm of Canterbury – would even approach the brilliance of the 'Fathers.' The ascension of Gregory to the papal throne at the end of the sixth century marked the beginning of 'Christendom' – a centuries-long effort to build the Kingdom of God on earth, or at least in the former dominion of the late Roman Empire.

> As far as the West is concerned, Gregory the First is the connecting link between the ancient and the medieval period. In him the patristic age comes to an end.[1]

Fisher's caveat, "as far as the West is concerned," represents a very important feature of the period that cannot be overlooked here at the beginning of our study. For there was indeed – as early as Gregory's pontificate if not much earlier – a recognizable rift widening between the two major geographical and linguistic regions of the professing Church. The Greek East and the Latin West had often agreed on doctrinal matters during the heyday of ecumenical councils and mighty patristic defenders of the faith. But from the time

[1] Fisher, George Park; *History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; 1896); 199.

Constantine I legalized Christianity – and later Theodosius legislated Christianity as the only religion of the Empire – the 'Church' had grown uncomfortably close to the 'State,' and politics mingled its corrupting influence into religion. Thus the affairs and relations of the eastern and western Church paralleled the affairs and relations of the eastern and western branches of the State. With the irretrievable 'fall' of the Roman (Western) Empire in AD 476, the West found itself increasingly cut off from the imperial court in Constantinople, often having to rely upon the Roman Bishop as both the spiritual and the temporal leader.

While the Eastern Empire continued to flourish (or at least act like it did) for centuries to come, the West was chaos and barbarism. The term 'Dark Ages' is often used to describe Western Europe between AD 500 and AD 1000, and while it is not historically correct, it does capture the relative decline in the civilization of these lands after the departure of Roman legions and Roman laws. Rome was a mere shadow of her former imperial glory – the Western Roman Emperors, vassals to the Eastern Emperor, lived in Ravenna and rarely even visited Rome. But Rome was still *Rome*; having ruled the world for over a thousand years it would continue to awe Europe simply because of that name. The revitalization and extension of the former power, however, would not be through military conquest; those days were forever past. The mantle of political power now passed to the Roman head of the Church, the Pope, and successive occupants of this office would strive mightily to restore Rome as the mistress of nations.

The Roman Church and its leaders had been politicized long before Gregory mounted the throne of St. Peter. In addition to being the Bishop of the Roman Church, the Pope had also become essentially a vassal duke to the Eastern Emperor in Constantinople, with civil responsibility and authority over a wide territory in central Italy. And while this arrangement brought some semblance of political stability to the Italian Peninsula, the territories of

Germania, Gaul, Britannia, Spain, and North Africa continued to seethe with invasion and unrest.

> The Pope, as Bishop of Rome, ruled what was a duchy of the empire, and paid taxes accordingly. The West as a whole became an area of tribal settlement, in which semi-barbarous kingdoms existed behind fluctuating frontiers. In these circumstances, the western Church found itself the residual legatee of Roman culture and civilization, and the only channel by which it could be transmitted to the new societies and institutions of Europe.[2]

This was a unique change of events for the Church: once the castaway of culture and spurned by the surrounding society, it was now the carrier of culture, charged with bridging the gap between the classical world of Athens and Rome and the barbarous world of the Goths, Vandals, and Huns. But was it the Church's responsibility to transmit ancient culture the 'new age'? That is the underlying ethical and ecclesiological question that must be considered, if not answered, during any study of the history of the Church in the Middle Ages. For it is a fact of history that Christianity attempted to bear the torch of the fallen Roman Empire into a new era in which the Church herself would become that unifying principle of civilized society.

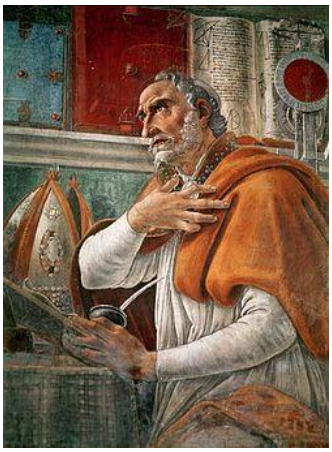
> Viewed historically, this period is characterized chiefly by the disintegration of the ancient world. New nations and new governments appear upon the scene. Ye the life of antiquity is perpetuated among the barbarians by the church. Theology becomes the bearer, not of doctrine alone, but of philosophy and culture as well.[3]

Except for tangential involvement, the Eastern Church will not factor significantly into this study of Medieval Church History. Seeburg explains, "The Greek church new no Middle Age, for it never got beyond the range of the

[2] Johnson, Paul; *A History of Christianity* (New York: Atheneum; 1976); 127.
[3] Seeburg, Reinhold; *The History of Doctrines*, *Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1977); 15.

ancient problems of Origen, *i.e.,* the Greek church had no Augustine."[4] The Greek Fathers – Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, the Cappadocians - had made their mark on Christian doctrine and had faded into the past. The rift between East and West, as noted above, formed and grew through the centuries in which political power concentrated in Constantinople and invasion and instability plagued Rome. The Eastern portion of the Empire, and hence the Greek wing of the Church, bore the brunt of the assault of Islam during the 7th and 8th Centuries, and this development tended to further estrange Latin Christianity from Greek. But except for the controversies that exacerbated this estrangement, there is little in the history of the Greek Church of this era that bears notice. Hence our focus will be primarily on those events and developments that occurred in the West.

Yet even in the West one cannot look to the Medieval Period to find anything like the advancement of doctrinal formulations found in the Patristic Period, or the modifications and reformation of doctrines encountered later. Without so much as a general council to pronounce it so, the general feeling within the Latin Church was that the doctrines of Christianity had been hammered out successfully and exhaustively during the era of the great Church Fathers, culminating in the greatest of them all: Augustine of Hippo. Augustine was the first theologian of the Church to apply his acumen to the widest possible scope of theological, ethical, and political topics. His writings touched upon issues ranging from the deeply speculative (*On the Trinity* and *On the Immortality of the Soul*) to the immanently worldly (*The City of God*), and across this wide spectrum he brought insight and erudition unmatched by any who had gone before or who came after him. Within his own lifetime his



Augustine (354-430) by Botticelli

[4] *Ibid.*; 16.

theological formulas and doctrinal opinions were viewed as *the* statements of orthodoxy for Catholic Christianity. After his death this influence merely grew and solidified until Augustinianism was the theoretical doctrinal system of the Western Church. 'Theoretical,' for as we shall see, the Church was often far better on paper than in practice.

The treatment of Augustinian theology by the Church leaders and scholars of the Medieval Period is very instructive as to the general view of theological study taken during that era. Somehow there settled upon the collective minds of medieval theologians the belief that all true speculative study had been accomplished in the Patristic Age, and that no one could improve upon that earlier time. "The first precept of safety is to guard the rule of right faith and to deviate in nowise from the ordinances of the fathers."[5] Thus subsequent scholars did not approach the Biblical writings with anything like a fresh quill. The famous 8th Century British scholar Alcuin summed up the attitude for himself which reflected medieval theology in general, "I wish to follow the footsteps of the holy fathers, neither adding to nor subtracting from their most sacred writings."[6] Rather then blaze new trails, medieval theologians commented upon the comments that were made by the Fathers, especially those made by Augustine. "The entire doctrinal history of the period may be treated as the history of Augustinianism."[7] The methodology employed by scholars subsequent to Augustine was that of the 'Sentences,' in which a topic would be set forth, followed by excerpts from the writings of the early fathers – particularly Augustine. Thus were published the *Sentences of Augustine* by Isadore of Seville in 636, again by Alcuin in 804, by Rabanus Maurus in 956, and Paschasius Radbertus in 865 – all little more than the reiteration of Augustinian theology in the words of the current author.

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[5] Pope Hormisdas (r. 514-523); quoted by Seeburg; Volume 1; 387.
[6] Pelikan, Jaroslav; *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*; (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1978); 15.
[7] *Ibid.*; Volume 2, 16.

This would be the pattern of Medieval Theology until the arrival on the scene of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century. With the possible exception of Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th Century, the scholarly panorama stretching before us – from the 5th Century of Augustine onward – is as destitute of doctrinal life as the bleakest desert. Seeburg comments, "Significant as is the period for the History of the Church, it furnishes very little material for the History of Doctrines."[8]

Perhaps this phenomenon of theological stagnation was necessitated by the overarching political instability in Western Europe during the early Middle Ages. And perhaps the initial cementation of doctrine into the forms delivered to the Medieval Church from the Patristic perpetuated itself – the lack of vibrant biblical and theological scholarship itself creating an atmosphere in which biblical and theological scholarship was both discouraged and distrusted. In any event, the doctrinal history of the Church in the Middle Ages inherited the interpretation of Scripture as promulgated by the great ecumenical councils: Nicæa (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451). Along with the theological system of Augustine, the canons of these four councils constituted the dogmatic authority upon which Medieval Christianity stood and from which it did not turn away.[9] Still, tradition progressed and the 'sentences' of medieval theologians became the authoritative doctrine of subsequent generations. As Pelikan states it,

> But the most notable characteristic of the appeal to patristic authority in these centuries was the pattern by which one generation's echo became the next generation's voice: theologians who had wanted to do no more than to repeat the fathers were themselves elevated to the company of the fathers.[10]

[8] *Ibid.*; 17.
[9] Neve, J. L.; *A History of Christian Thought, Volume 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; 1946); 173.
[10] Pelikan; 16.

The first great representative of Western Christianity of the Middle Ages is Pope Gregory the Great, the first of that name to hold the Roman pontificate. Gregory, as we have seen in the closing chapters of the previous study, was more of a systematizer and administrator than an original theologian. But that suited the spirit of the age, and Gregory set the pattern for subsequent popes to follow. The importance of Gregory to the tenor of the Medieval Church cannot be overstated, for in him we find the common juxtaposition of *theoretical* Augustinianism on the one hand, and *practical* Semi-Pelagianism on the other. In doctrine the Church upheld the Augustinian view of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man – the "monergism of grace."[11] In practice, however, the sacramental system of the Catholic priesthood reached out to the 'inner light' within man, who must work alongside of divine grace if he is ever to attain to salvation. Augustinianism looked good on paper, for it echoed the doctrines of Scripture, especially the teachings of Paul. But Semi-Pelagianism was good for church business, good for keeping a catholic thumb on the consciences of king and peasant, and good for the building of the outward Kingdom of God upon earth, or at least in Western Europe.

Pope Gregory I (r. 590-604)

Gregory the Great was the pope who firmly established the Catholic Church as the depository of saving grace for the masses, evolving the sacrament of the Eucharist into a sacrifice of redemption, and codifying the doctrine of Purgatory into an integral component of the path to salvation. "Gregory transformed virtues into rites and ordinances and religious acts. Humility became monkery, repentance became penance. He made the miracle a characteristic trait in religion, classified angels, devils, sacraments and saints, emphasized fear and hope rather than a sure trust in God through Christ…He externalized internal graces into acts and ceremonies after the

[11]Neve; 174.

fashion of the mysteries, and extended the power of the Church beyond earth through purgatory to the very gates of heaven."[12]

In these things Gregory merely strengthened patterns of ecclesiology that had been in place for centuries – an ecclesiology in which the role of the priest as mediator between God and man through the sacraments of the Catholic Church. The supremacy of the Roman Bishop over the other dioceses of the Western Church was virtually established by the time of Gregory's ascension, though the Eastern Church would never acquiesce. Furthermore, it was also becoming universally accepted that the Roman Pontiff bore the civil authority of Rome and its immediate environs, as well as the spiritual authority over the Church. "The Western doctrine had already moved unmistakably in the direction of papal monarchy, which was to reach its climax in the thirteenth century."[13] Thus the advancements (retrenchments?) that Gregory made with regard to the centralizing of the faith into the Roman Curia were, at most, innovations on a theme that had begun centuries earlier.

The unique contribution of Gregory – and perhaps that which earns him the appellation 'the Great' – was his recognition of a new role for the Church within the political and social vacuum formed by the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire. The demise of the Roman legions in the West, and the preoccupation of the East with both Asiatic and Islamic invasions, left the doors of Western Europe wide open to continued predatory incursions of Huns, Goths, Lombards, Vandals, and – in the 9th Century – Vikings. Before long Europe was a picked-over bone; there was not much left for the invading hordes to steal. So they settled down in the new lands and began to build towns, to farm, to buy and sell with older, established cities. In short, Western Europe experienced a massive wave of immigration of greater magnitude than that witnessed by the United States from 1880 to 1920. Viewing this phenomenon from near the

[12] Neve; 175.
[13] Pelikan; 48.

beginning, Gregory uniquely perceived opportunity for the Church, and not entirely in a negative, self-aggrandizing manner.

Gregory saw the opportunity for evangelism among the barbarians who were now comprising an ever-increasing proportion of the population of Western Europe, and who were displacing the old Roman culture with their own somewhat inchoate, violent culture. Gregory was perhaps the first to see, though admittedly in vague and undefined terms, the potential for building a Kingdom of God out of the ruins of the Roman Empire. Although it is impossible from his own writings to discern just how comprehensively Gregory conceived of the phenomenon, one can trace the origins of the 'Holy Roman Empire' back to his papacy, and to the emphasis he placed upon evangelism and Christian scholarship.

Gregory was aware that many of the Germanic and Asiatic tribes that had flowed into the territories of the former Empire had 'converted' to Christianity in order to maintain a somewhat peaceful relationship with the Eastern Emperor. But he also knew that the favorite brand of Christianity among these pagan barbarians was Arianism, a Christology easily suited to simplistic pagan mythology as it is much easier on the mind than trinitarianism. But Arianism was heresy, and had been staunchly opposed by successive Roman Bishops down through the centuries. Gregory's idea was to convert the Arians to orthodox, Nicæan Christianity, and to do so through the sending of missionaries from Rome. This strategy – remarkably biblical for a Church already overgrown with extra-biblical traditions – would have a profound impact on the history of Western Civilization, far beyond anything Gregory could have anticipated. Through the preaching of the orthodox Gospel the barbarian tribes would be converted (again) to Roman Catholicism, which at that time was as close to biblical Christianity as one could hope to find in the world. And through the Episcopal hierarchy of bishops and priests, Rome would extend (again) the structure of society and law that once constituted the Pax Romana.

Prior to becoming Pope, Gregory had adopted the monastic life and had chosen the order of Benedict due to its orderly and sensible structure of life. Upon his elevation to the throne of St. Peter, Gregory not only made the Benedictines the 'official monks of the Catholic Church' (he did that), he also turned to the Benedictines when the time came to send forth his first missionary team. The destination was among the bleakest portions of Europe in terms of both paganism and political instability: the island of Britain. Britannia was one of the first of the former Roman provinces to suffer the loss both of Roman legions and of Roman law and order, and the land was soon contested by both indigenous and invasive tribes. Britons – a mongrel race of Roman, Celt and native British peoples – were left in nominal charge of the southern part of the island, but their hold on power was soon challenged by Norsemen, Jutes (from Denmark), Saxons and Angles (from Germany). What Christianity remained after the era of Constantine I (who, by the way, was with his legions in York, England when crowned Augustus) went into hiding or disappeared altogether. Brutality and paganism prevailed in the land to which Gregory sent his first emissary of the Gospel: Augustine.

Augustine was the prior of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Andrew's in Rome, where Gregory had served happily as a monk before being raised by acclamation to the office of Roman Bishop. It appears from contemporary records, as scant as they are, that Augustine was not an excessively ambitious man, and was probably content to live out his days in the sedentary comfort of the priory. Gregory must have perceived somewhat of a bold and courageous streak in him, however, that he would select an elderly monk to lead such a dangerous mission. Augustine did not refuse the call, and accompanied by an

entourage of monks and priests numbering about forty, along with letters of introduction to the Frankish lords of former Gaul, he traveled to war-torn and pagan Britain in the year 595. There he established a Benedictine (of course) monastery at Canterbury and, in 597, was elevated by Pope Gregory to be the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

Gregory's point of contact in Britain was King Aethelberht of Kent, whose marriage to the daughter of a Christian king of the Franks probably influenced him to investigate the Catholic religion. Aethelberht met Augustine upon his arrival on English shores, and invited the missionary party to take up residence in his royal city of Canterbury (which was essentially the squalid ruins of a former Roman outpost).

> The evident sincerity of the missionaries, their single-mindedness, their courage under trial, and, above all, the disinterested character of Augustine himself and the unworldly note of his doctrine made a profound impression on the mind of the king. He asked to be instructed and his baptism was appointed to take place at Pentecost. Whether the queen and her Frankish bishop had any real hand in the process of this comparatively sudden conversion, it is impossible to say. St. Gregory's letter written to Bertha herself, when the news of the king's baptism had reached Rome, would lead us to infer, that, while little or nothing had been done before Augustine's arrival, afterwards there was an endeavor on the part of the queen to make up for past remissness…The remissness does seem to have been atoned for, when we take into account the Christian activity associated with the names of this royal pair during the next few months. Aethelberht's conversion naturally gave a great impetus to the enterprise of Augustine and his companions.[14]

Aethelberht exerted his influence upon the nobility of southern England – mainly comprised at that time of Saxons – and his wife Bertha called upon the support of her Catholic relatives across the Channel, and soon Augustine had a thriving evangelistic mission going in southern England. Providence would decree that the Saxons would ultimately unite most of England under one king

[14] New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia; http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02081a.htm

(just in time for the Norman invasion, as it would turn out), so over the course of several centuries Catholic Christianity would become the dominant religion in the British Isles.

This introduction of Catholic Christianity into England during the pontificate of Gregory the Great began a chain of events in which the Catholic Church in England would itself serve as a fountainhead of orthodoxy back into Continental Europe. The legacy of Augustine's work in Kent spread well beyond merely the illustrious occupants of his archbishopric at Canterbury – though with men such as Lanfranc, Anselm, Bradwardine, and Cranmer the See of Canterbury was one of the most renown in medieval Church History. It was Augustine's pattern of monastic order, study, and piety that had the most immediate and important effect not only on Christianity in England, but even across the Channel among the formerly pagan tribes of Germany and France. The first stellar example of this pious and scholarly influence came on the scene roughly a half century after Augustine, an English monk known to posterity as the Venerable Bede.

Little is known of Bede's early years, and his baptismal name is an insoluble mystery. It appears that he was born in the immediate environs of the twin monastic centers of Wearmouth and Jarrow, and that he basically grew up among the monks, himself receiving the tonsure at an early age. The only autobiographical information comes from the last chapter of his monumental *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*,

> Thus much concerning the ecclesiastical history of Britain, and especially of the race of the English, I, Baeda, a servant of Christ and a priest of the monastery of the blessed apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, which is at Wearmouth and at Jarrow (in Northumberland), have with the Lord's help composed so far as I could gather it either from ancient documents or from the traditions of the elders, or from my own knowledge. I was born in the territory of the said monastery, and at the age of seven I was, by the care of my relations, given to the most reverend Abbot Benedict [St. Benedict Biscop], and afterwards to Ceolfrid, to be educated. From that time I have spent the whole of my life within that monastery, devoting

> all my pains to the study of the Scriptures, and amid the observance of monastic discipline and the daily charge of singing in the Church, it has been ever my delight to learn or teach or write. In my nineteenth year I was admitted to the diaconate, in my thirtieth to the priesthood, both by the hands of the most reverend Bishop John [St. John of Beverley], and at the bidding of Abbot Ceolfrid. From the time of my admission to the priesthood to my present fifty-ninth year, I have endeavored for my own use and that of my brethren, to make brief notes upon the holy Scripture, either out of the works of the venerable Fathers or in conformity with their meaning and interpretation.[15]

This was the age of the *Scriptorium*, the precursor to the library, and Bede was one of the great masters of the age. Everyone is familiar with the image of rows of Benedictine monks silently and patiently copying page after page of Scripture, commentary, legal code, poetry, and history – it was more than mere stereotype, it was the passing on of ancient literature on parchment. The monastic libraries thus filled – manuscript and codex by manuscript and codex – would be the fuel to fire the Renaissance hundreds of years later. To be sure, there was no general distribution of literacy among the populations; indeed, the vast majority of the nobility were illiterate in the early Middle Ages. This was the domain of the Church, and in particular of the monasteries (priest, often comprised of younger sons of the nobility, were also predominantly illiterate).

> The dominant material in the West was parchment – the most durable, but also the most expensive and difficult to work with. Moreover, its raw materials could be obtained anywhere – from sheepskin, calf or goat – unlike papyrus, which came from Egypt, or paper, shipped from the East but not generally available before the twelfth century. And it could be washed, scraped and used again. The method used was to take four sheets folded together, that is eight leaves of sixteen pages, which formed a *quaternio* or copy-book. One of these was distributed to each of a number of scribes, who had to transcribe the copy-book

[15] Catholic Encyclopedia; http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02384a.htm

> on the same number of pages. There might be as many as twenty in a *scriptorium*. Each sat on a bench or stool, with his feet on a footstool, and wrote on his knees; a desk in front held the book he was copying, and a side-table his quills, ink, knife, eraser, compasses and ruler.[16]

The finished products were stored in the monastery's library, or traded to other monasteries for additional works to copy. Later, as literacy (or the appearance thereof) became more socially valuable, kings and wealthy merchants would commission copies, thus providing an additional source of income for increasingly wealthy monasteries. The printing press would end all of this, of course; but for the millennium between Augustine and Gutenberg, the monastic scribes preserved the record of human knowledge and translated it from antiquity to the modern age.

> The monks were cultural carriers, not creators. The most learned and enterprising of them – Bede of Jarrow is a good example – interested themselves in biblical translations and commentaries, in chronology, and in the writing of history.[17]

So durable were the parchments that there is extant a 7th Century copy of John's Gospel, widely believed to have been Bede's own copy, preserved in a museum in Stonyhurst, England. "The work of the *scriptoria* was overwhelmingly centred [*sic*] on the Fathers, chiefly Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and later, Bede; on bibles and lives of the saints; and on liturgical works."[18] So powerful was this ecclesiological emphasis that when any ancient parchment turned up that did not contain material pertinent to Christianity, more often than not the original text was scrubbed clean from the material, and some arcane monastic rule book transcribed in its place. Alan Hirshfeld, in his book *Eureka Man*, recounts how the lost writings of the Sicilian natural philosopher Archimedes were discovered in the barely visible ghost

[16] Johnson, *A History of Christianity*; 154-155.
[17] *Idem.*
[18] *Ibid.*; 157.

etchings of just such a medieval church document.[19] It would not be until the 13th Century that the classical writings of ancient Greece and Rome would again find favor, and by then they were often quite hard to find at all.

Bede's spiritual successor was Alcuin, a leading scholar at the cathedral school in York and the master architect of what would come to be called the Carolingian Renaissance. Whereas Bede was primarily a historian and a translator, Alcuin was primarily an educator, and his career at York was instrumental in raising that diocese to an archbishopric second in influence only to Canterbury within the English Church. His skills drew the attention of the greatest man of the age – the Frankish king, Charles the Great, better known as *Charlemagne*. Charlemagne invited Alcuin to his court in Aachen, where the English monk supervised a burgeoning interest in literature, science, and general knowledge that might have accelerated the Renaissance by five hundred years, if not for the death of its chief sponsor, the Frankish king.

Alcuin (c. 735 – 804)

Alcuin at York revived the classical style of education, employing the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* of ancient Greece and Rome. The *trivium* – Latin for 'the three ways' – comprised the core educational material of grammar, logic, and rhetoric; basically the command of language, which in medieval Europe meant the Latin language. The *quadrivium* introduced a broader, more life-centered education, with the addition to the *trivium* of geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy. Yet this embryonic renaissance in the 8th Century was conducted in a rigidly conservative environment in which all scholarship was bounded by the writings handed down from the Fathers. Pelikan notes, "Alcuin was likewise an industrious and encyclopedic collector of ancient authorities,

[19] Hirshfeld, Alan *Eureka Man: The Life and Legacy of Archimedes* (New York: Walker & Company; 2009).

one who followed the consensus of the fathers, 'introducing nothing novel and accepting nothing but what is to be found in their catholic writings.'"[20]

Alcuin and the Venerable Bede traced their spiritual heritage through Augustine of Canterbury to Pope Gregory the Great, and to Rome. Thus the bold missionary journey launched by Gregory in the late 6th Century had the effect of tying England intimately to Rome for centuries to come. And the return of catholic scholarship *from* England to the continent had the effect of spreading Catholic orthodoxy throughout the slowly emerging 'empire' of the Franks, the first major unifying political dynasty in post-Roman Europe. The vision of Charlemagne, coupled with the abiding vision of Gregory the Great, was of one great Catholic and Holy Empire – with one Emperor over wielding the civil sword and one Pope the spiritual sword. This would constitute the 'one world order' of the Middle Ages: a steady pursuit by both Pope and Emperor to bring all of Europe (including each other) under his authority, and the history of the Middle Ages is largely the story of the utter failure of this grandiose vision. Only one man came close – *Charlemagne* – and it is to his remarkable life we turn in the next session.

[20] Pelikan; 11.

Session 2: **The Kingdom of the Franks**

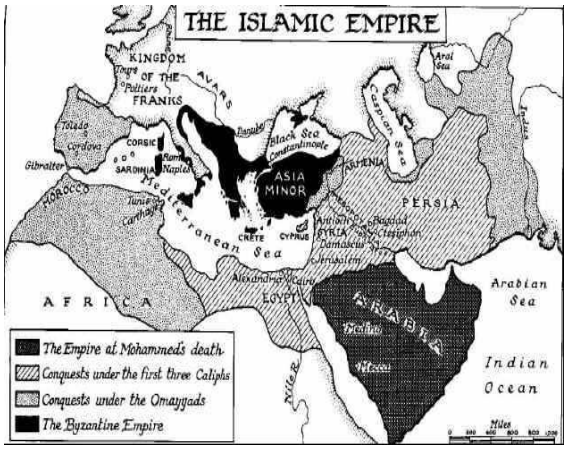
Text Reading: **Acts 17:26 - 31**

"Perhaps the interpretation of the Kuran
would now be taught in the schools of Oxford,
and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people
the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mohammed."
(Edward Gibbon)

October 10, 732 is perhaps the most significant date in the history of Western Civilization, yet it is a date which has passed 1,280 times without so much as a parade or firecracker. Historians are familiar with the date, and many would agree to its importance; but for the countless millions of Europeans and the conquerors and colonists of the Americas who have lived since that momentous date, it means nothing. On that day, across a field situated in southern France between the towns of Poitiers and Tours, a battle was fought that finally stemmed a seemingly inexorable tide of Islamic expansion across the former Roman Empire. It was called the Battle of Poitiers until a more famous battle was fought in 1356 between the English under the Black Prince, and the French under the latest in a long series of incompetent monarchs. Since then it has been almost universally assigned to the other city near the battlefield, Tours. It is not too much to say that, humanly-speaking, the fate of Western Europe and of Catholic Christianity hung in the balance when the army of the Franks finally routed the indefatigable armies of Islam on that day.

In order to understand by Edward Shepherd Creasy included the Battle of Tours in his late 19th Century work, *Decisive Battles of the World*, one need only

consider again the incredible expansion of Islamic rule and religion over the one hundred year span from Mohammed's death in AD 632.



"Exactly a century passed between the death of Mohammed and the date of the battle of Tours. During that century the followers of the Prophet had torn away half the Roman empire; and, besides their conquests over Persia, the Saracens had overrun Syria, Egypt, Africa, and Spain, in an uncheckered and apparently irresistible career of victory."[21]

Of most immediate significance was the conquest of the Muslim forces over the Visigoth tribes that had earlier conquered Roman Hispania, and had ruled that territory since the 5th Century. These former Germanic barbarians converted to Arian Christianity in the late 6th Century, so Spain was ostensibly 'Christian' during the century of Islam's most aggressive expansion. The Muslim tidal wave crashed over Visigoth Spain, wiping out the various Visigoth strongholds in less than two decades, and by the 730s had poured over the Pyrenees into the province of Aquitaine in southwestern France.

Aquitaine, later made famous by its remarkable duchess Eleanor, was in the early 8th Century a minor duchy held by the militarily incompetent Count Eudes. The Muslim armies, commanded by the governor of Moorish Spain Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi, rolled through the territories of Count Eudes with the same reckless and unstoppable abandon that had already carried the religion of Mohammed into Sicily and Southern Italy, across North Africa and the Middle East, far east into Persia, and to the very gates of the Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor. To all appearances Pope Gregory's dream of a Christian Empire in

[21] Creasy, Edward Shepherd; *Decisive Battles of the World* (New York: The Colonial Press; 1899); 160.

Western Europe would be stillborn, and the development of Western civilization would have been oriented toward Mecca instead of Rome.

> From such calamities was Christendom delivered by the genius and fortune of one man. Charles, the illegitimate son of the elder Pepin, was content with the titles of mayor or duke of the Franks; but he deserved to become the father of a line of kings.[22]

Charles, the illegitimate son of Pepin, is better known to history by the appellation he received on account of his momentous victory at Tours: Charles Martel - Charles 'the Hammer.' Charles' official title was 'Mayor of the Palace,' which at that time was effectively the ruler of the Frankish Kingdom under the usually inept Frankish king. But more on that later. Count Eudes appealed to Charles for military deliverance from the Islamic onslaught that had already overrun his Aquitaine. Charles prevaricated, not being a natural ally of Eudes, who was otherwise a troublesome vassal. The Palace Mayor stated his intention to let the Muslim forces expend themselves in plundering and razing the villages of Aquitaine (conveniently weakening Eudes for any later conflicts with Charles), and then to come upon them suddenly in their exhaustion. If Charles hoped to pounce upon an inebriated invading army he was to be disappointed; Muslims, of course, do not drink alcohol.

The army of the Franks and that of the Saracens finally arrayed against one another along the banks of the Loire River in southwestern France (then known as the Frankish Kingdom of Neutria). The Islamic forces, confident of victory, attacked first, and their skilled cavalry wreaked havoc upon Charles' infantry. The battle, however, would highlight a difference between the two peoples – Christian European and Islamic Arab – that would persist through the Crusades half a century later. Northern infantry and cavalry were slow, but well armored and well armed, whereas their Muslim enemies were swift upon their

[22] Gibbon, Edward *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; Volume 3* (New York: Random House; nd); 223.

steeds and fired their bows with deadly accuracy while on the run. But as long as the better armored infantry and cavalry held together, successive tides of Muslim attackers would break against the impenetrable wall. This is what happened over the course of two days at Tours, until finally, late on the second day, a rumor went through the Muslim troops that Frankish infantry had swung behind them and were raiding their tents, filled with plunder from months of campaigning in Aquitaine. It was an empty rumor, but enough for many of the Saracens to break for the rear, whereupon the Frankish infantry and armored cavalry hit them hard. Abdul Rahman was killed, and the battle turned into a rout. Contemporary accounts of the number killed on each side are, of course, unreliable. But both Christian and Muslim historical annals record it as a massive defeat for continuing spread of Islam.

> The enduring importance of the battle of Tours in the eyes of the Muslims is attested not only by the expressions of 'the deadly battle,' and 'the disgraceful overthrow' which their writers consistently employ when referring to it, but also by the fact that no more serious attempts at conquest beyond the Pyrenees were made by the Saracens. Charles Martel, and his son and grandson, were left at leisure to consolidate and extend their power.[23]

Creasy's comment about the significance of the Battle of Tours is accurate, and it is remarkable that so little is said of this conflict in modern history books. The college level textbook *The Mainstream of Civilization* devotes all of one sentence to the battle; and no reference to Charles Martel or to the Battle of Tours can be found in Kenneth Clark's *Civilization*. Still, Creasy misses the mark when he employs the term 'leisure' in reference to the Franks (though it is clear that he means with reference to the Muslim armies); for the Germanic people known as the Franks were anything but leisurely, and their impact on European and Church history across the Middle Ages was both dynamic and long-lasting.

[23] Creasy; 166-167.

There is some debate as to the origins of the Franks and, as is the case with most of the Germanic tribes that invaded the disintegrating Roman Empire, no definitive answer is likely to be found. Historians are in agreement, however, that this particular Teutonic tribe came into its own under the command of Clovis (c. 466-511), who was the son of Childeric and the grandson of Merovich. Clovis was the first tribal chieftain to unite the Franks under his command, and from that position of unity and strength, to lead the Franks in what was to become a centuries-long conquest of western Europe. Clovis' particular clan was named after his grandfather, and the dynasty that he founded is called the Merovingian. But of that line Clovis turned out to be the only one of importance, and that importance extended beyond the conquest of territory. For it was Clovis who first accepted Catholic Christianity, ostensibly at the behest of his wife, but probably because he perceived some political advantage in doing so. He was baptized at a small monastery in Reims on Christmas Day, AD 496. This was a full century before the pontificate of Gregory I, and no one at that time could have predicted the long-term significance of a Catholic Frankish king to the dream of a Holy Roman Empire. Nonetheless, it started with Clovis.

Conquests of the Former Roman Empire

And it almost ended there, too. Germanic tribes were notoriously hard to control, even harder to unite (as Chancellor Bismarck would discover as late as the 19th Century), and after Clovis his Merovingian descendants were generally weak kings, generally functioning as puppets to the strongest coalition of Germanic chieftains at the time. By the beginning of the 8th Century the royal title was still hereditary within the Merovingian clan, but the royal power had shifted to a unique office known as the 'Mayor of the Palace.' History has repeatedly shown that title without power cannot endure and this was certainly

the case among the Franks. "The Mayor of the Palace gradually became the king *de facto* and used the real king as a puppet."[24] In 687 the current Mayor of the Palace, Pepin (Pippin) of Herstal, defeated several other Frankish chieftains at the Battle of Tertry and thus consolidated a great deal of power into his own hands. This power passed upon Pepin's death in 714 to his illegitimate son, Charles, of whom we have already heard. Pepin and Charles were glad to continue the charade of the Merovingian kings, so long as real power stayed with the Mayor of the Palace. But Charles' son, also Pepin (and known as Pepin the Short), ended the farce and claimed the royal title of King of the Franks. In exchange for assistance against the Arian Lombards in Northern Italy, Pope Zachary bestowed legitimacy on Pipin's usurpation of the throne. Probably in honor Pipin's great warrior father, the new Frankish dynasty became known as the Carolingian, and its greatest son was *Carolus Magnus*, better known as Charlemagne. It was principally the Carolingian line that both held the Frankish Empire together and generated its remarkable expansion.

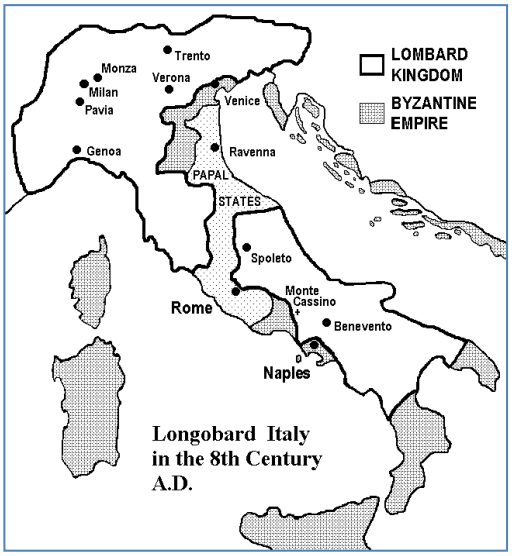
> It was the first real state to emerge from the universal wreckage. It became at last a wide and vigorous political reality, and from it are derived two great powers of modern Europe, France and the German Empire.[25]

The development of the dream of the Holy Roman Empire will take a giant leap forward with Charlemagne, but for the moment we need to turn our attention to Rome and to the struggles facing a succession of Roman popes during the same period. Rome, and the Roman Church, was ostensibly under the sovereignty and protection of the Eastern Empire. In reality, however, the Emperor Justinian (reigned 527-565) was the last eastern emperor to exert any significant military and administrative presence as far west as Italy. For all intents and purposes, Rome was on its own against the succession of Germanic invasions that racked the Italian Peninsula from the 4th through the 7th Centuries.

[24] Wells, H. G.; *The Outline of History; Volume 1* (New York: Doubleday; 1971); 537.
[25] *Ibid.*; 536.

The rising power in the north – the Franks – presented the Roman Pontiffs with another option, and it was not long before the popes began to seek assistance from the Merovingians and, later, the Carolingians.

The thorn in Rome's side was the *Langobards* – meaning 'long beards' – later transliterated into Lombards. Again, little is known of the origins of this Germanic tribe, which comes suddenly on the historical scene via invasion of Italy in AD 568. The source from which this conquering horde first stemmed is made even more remote by the fact that they are known to history with reference to their facial hair and not their region of origin. In 568 Emperor Justinian had been dead three years, and the Byzantine Empire was again barely able to controls matters in the East. Thus the Lombards did not have much trouble



conquering Italy, and within a year controlled major parts of the peninsula, and had the Papal States completely surrounded. Like so many of their predecessors, however, the Lombards 'converted' to Christianity and gave nominal obeisance to the papacy. But the Lombards were rather a rough lot, as Germanic barbarian tribes go, and successive popes tended to feel more the prisoner of the Lombardic king than the spiritual shepherd of the Lombard tribe.

No longer able to turn to Constantinople for assistance, successive popes began to petition the Frankish kings to come south of the Alps and enforce some control over the Lombards. The first call to the north came to Charles Martel after his momentous victory over the Saracens and during an interregnum when there was no official 'king' of the Franks. Charles refused the request, as he had received assistance from the Lombards in his western campaigns. But a correspondence of events in AD 751 began to forge the chain that would bind the

Papacy and the Frankish Empire for many centuries to come. Aistulf, the king of the Lombards since 749, launched a vigorous attack into northern Italy and captured Ravenna, the royal city of the Byzantine imperial representative even after the abdication of Romulus Augustulus in 476. This Lombardic victory effectively ended all hope of military assistance from the East and cast Rome adrift politically. In the same year Pope Zachary officially sanctioned the usurpation of the Merovingian crown by Charles Martel's son, Pepin III, thereby granting papal blessing upon the Carolingian Dynasty. Obviously the pope was motivated in this move by the threat posed by the marauding Lombards, and he expected Pepin to show appropriate gratitude by coming to Rome's defense. This Pepin was all too happy to do, and Zachary and his successors would learn that the Frankish sword cut both ways. While the Carolingian kings did generally prove to be loyal Catholic monarchs, they would also prove to be far from subservient to papal wishes and would periodically exert their political will in matters ecclesiastical.

Pepin the Short evidently saw the political advantage of an alliance of sorts between the Carolingian court and the Papal curia. But it was Pepin's son, Charlemagne, who first displays a perception of that ephemeral dream: the *Holy Roman Empire*.

> He had become seized with the idea of a Holy Roman Empire, co-ordinate with the Holy Catholic Church, each having world-wide dominion, each advancing the interests of the other, each supreme within its own sphere, and both together bringing peace and the blessing of civilization to all mankind.[26]

Charlemagne[27] succeeded his father to the Frankish throne upon Pepin's death in 768, but shared power with his brother Carloman. This was the Frankish custom, to divide the inheritance of power between the sons (usually,

[26] Newman; *A Manual of Church History*; 440.
[27] Charles was not, of course, denominated 'the Great' so early in his career; but for the sake of clarity he will be referred to by his more familiar 'Charlemagne' throughout the narrative.

but not always, limited to the legitimate sons). This would also prove to be the bane of the Frankish Empire as time and time again the brothers would act antagonistically toward one another rather than in concert. The test of Charlemagne's working relation with his brother did not last long, however, as Carloman died of natural causes in 771 leaving Charlemagne as the sole ruler. A year later the Roman Pontiff, Stephen III died and was succeeded by Hadrian I, who quickly put forth an earnest request once again for Frankish assistance against the recalcitrant Lombards.

Charlemagne was perennially occupied with trying to subdue the stubborn Saxons on his northern borders, but he recognized the opportunity for imperial expansion contained in Hadrian's plea, and moved the Frankish armies across the Alps into Northern Italy in 773. With a year's time he had conquered the Lombards and proclaimed himself *King of the Franks and the Lombards*. He sent Desiderius, the conquered Lombard king into exile in a French monastery and Desiderius' son was packed off to Constantinople. Before Charlemagne had ruled five years on his own, the entire peninsula of Italy was effectively annexed to the growing Frankish Empire. Pope Hadrian commemorated the victory by minting the first known papal coin, and by no longer dating official correspondence according to the Byzantine calendar, but rather dating from the beginning of Charlemagne's rule as King of the Franks. Clearly a new era had dawned in Western Europe, for a new kind of king was on the throne.

We might say that the official date of birth of the Holy Roman Empire was Christmas Day in the year 800. Charlemagne was in Rome to show his support of a beleaguered pope, Hadrian's successor Leo III. The king was attending mass in St. Peter's cathedral when Pope Leo 'surprised' him by placing an imperial crown upon his head.

> Christmas Day 800 has been hailed as one of the major turning points in European history, yet historians have argued for generations about exactly what happened on that day, who was responsible for it and what it signified. About

> the simple facts there is no dispute. Charles attended the Nativity mass in St. Peter's. At the head of the congregation he prostrated himself for the petitionary prayers. At their conclusion he rose, and it was as he did so that the pope stepped forward and placed a circlet of gold upon his head. At this, the assembled throng acclaimed Charles as emperor: *Carolo piisimo augusto, a Deo coronato magno et pacific imperatore, vita et victoria!* "Long life and victory to Charles, the most pious Augustus, the great, peace-loving emperor, crowned by God!"[28]

Charlemagne claimed to be surprised and disturbed by what Leo did, and stated that if he had known what was going to happen he would not have attended the Mass. But he did not repudiate the honor, received the obeisance of the gathered nobility, and subsequently styled himself as 'Imperator' and 'Augustus.' With this coronation began the thousand year history of the Holy Roman Empire – the vain attempt to bring all of Europe under the civil authority of one man and the spiritual authority of one man. Of the latter office, the papacy, there would be but one occupant even remotely deserving of the dignity encompassed by the dream, Pope Innocent III; of the former only three: Charlemagne, Charles V, and Napoleon Bonaparte. And the latter two modeled their lives and their conquests on Charlemagne, the only 'great one' in history to have that denomination simply blended into his name. Edward Gibbon, famous for his monumental work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, writes of Charlemagne,

> The sedentary reader is amazed by his incessant activity of mind and body; and his subjects and enemies were not less astonished at his sudden presence at he moment when they believed him at the most distant extremity of the empire; neither peace nor war, nor summer nor winter, were a reason of repose; and our fancy cannot really reconcile the annals of his reign with the geography of his expeditions.[29]

[28] Wilson, Derek; *Charlemagne* (New York: Doubleday; 2006); 80-81.
[29] Gibbon, Volume 3; 34-35.

The Carolingian Renaissance:

Charlemagne was more than just a conquering warrior; he was also a devout son of the Church and a devotee of education, though he was not a well-educated man himself. By any analysis his reign must be judged as 'enlightened' within the context of that era most commonly known as the Dark Ages. He had several court cities (for he traveled almost continually expanding, securing, and governing his domains), but his favorite was Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle), where he established an assemblage of the best and brightest minds Europe had to offer. The intellectual leader of this 'university' was the English Benedictine monk Alcuin, whom Charlemagne had coaxed from England in 782 and who quickly became one of the king's chief advisors on matters both civil and ecclesiastical. Alcuin was not the cause of the Carolingian Renaissance (for it was Charlemagne's interest in advancing scholarship that led him to call Alcuin to his court in the first place), but the British monk's intellectual acumen and his devotion to a world patterned on Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* – 'Of the City of God' – undoubtedly had the most profound impact in directing that 'renaissance.'

> Indeed in the mind of a man like Alcuin the desire to spread the faith, to understand it fully through literacy and knowledge of the scriptures and the ancillary disciplines, and to adorn and celebrate it through art, were all part of the same Christian vision, whose intensity and brightness were the products of personal conviction. The level of culture was directly related to the degree of faith. It was Alcuin who filled Charlemagne's mind wit the missionary fervor of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, and it was Alcuin who showed him a copy of

> Gregory the Great's letter to King Aethelbert of Kent on the subject of conversion by race.[30]

Charlemagne's empire and the renaissance associated with his court was the first taste of a phenomenon that would become rather pervasive in Europe after the Reformation, especially among Germanic (Lutheran) nations. The name for the pseudo-theocratic relationship between Church and State, developed under Charlemagne, was coined in the post-Reformation era as 'Erastianism.'

> **Erastianism,** doctrine that the state is superior to the church in ecclesiastical matters. It is named after the 16th-century Swiss physician and Zwinglian theologian Thomas Erastus, who never held such a doctrine. He opposed excommunication as unscriptural, advocating in its stead punishment by civil authorities. The state, he held, had both the right and the duty to punish all offenses, ecclesiastical as well as civil, wherever all the citizens adhered to a single religion. The power of the state in religious matters was thus limited to a specific area. Erastianism acquired its present meaning from Richard Hooker's defense of secular supremacy in *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (1593–1662) and as a result of debates held during the Westminster Assembly of 1643.[31]

Charlemagne's view of Church and State was perhaps not as well-considered as that of Thomas Erastus or Richard Hooker, and was probably more visceral. He possessed a deep respect for the ecclesiastical supremacy of the Roman papacy and deemed the unity of the Church as embodied in the rule of one Pope in Rome. But it would not of occurred to him that a bishop of the Church, even the chief bishop of the Church, could effectively exercise civil authority over the kings and barons of the land.

> The empire which Charlemagne founded was meant to be a vast theocratic monarchy, whose sway should extend over all the globe…In his capacity as Emperor, Charles was placed over all Christendom, and subject only to God and to His law. He was indeed the most obedient son, the most devoted servant of the Church, in so far as it was the medium and the channel of salvation; but its

[30] Johnson; *A History of Christianity*; 160.
[31] http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191050/Erastianism

> supreme lord and ruler, in so far as its organization was earthly and it require earthly direction. The provinces of State and Church, although distinct and separate, were closely connected and, so to speak, combined in the person of the Emperor as their highest representative.[32]

In the development of this 'theocratic monarchy' it would seem that Charlemagne and Alcuin also developed a symbiotic relationship, each man supporting and, in turn, benefitting from the advancement of the other's interests. "Alcuin saw in Charlemagne Augustine's ideal Christian emperor, the *felix imperator*…and it would seem that the emperor accepted this identification."[33] Alcuin's interpretation of Augustine would mould Charlemagne's already innate conception of the role of imperial power vis-à-vis the ecclesiastical authorities,

> Apparently from Alcuin's pen came Charlemagne's description of the relative roles of emperor and pope: the former was to defend the church from the attacks of its pagan foes and to foster the catholic faith within the church; the latter was to assist the imperial armies by lifting up his hands to God, as Moses did for the hosts of Israel, assuring victory for the catholic empire over the enemies of God and of his church.[34]

Alcuin supported the extension of the empire under Charlemagne, but he could not have been entirely comfortable with the brutal methods employed by the Frankish king to effect that growth. By 796, in his sixties, Alcuin desired retirement from court life and was granted this by Charlemagne when the abbot of the monastery at St. Martin of Tours died. The emperor named Alcuin as abbot on the condition that the learned monk be available to provide council as needed to the royal court. Alcuin spent his declining years establishing a library and a center of academic training at Tours in much the same manner as he had done at York and at Aachen. He died on the 19th of May, AD 804.

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[32] Kurtz, Johann Heinrich; *History of the Christian Church; Volume 1* (Miami: Hard Press; nd); 318.
[33] Pelikan; 49.
[34] *Idem.*

Charlemagne himself lived only a decade beyond the death of Alcuin, only fourteen years beyond his crowning as Emperor, and not nearly long enough to consolidate his territorial gains and make certain a successful transfer of power upon his demise. At almost 72 years of age, the emperor was already a very old man for his era when he took to bed in January 814 with a fever. "The mighty constitution that had survived injuries in battle and the hunting field, as well as diseases encountered during his long, peripatetic, reign, succumbed at last to pleurisy on 28 January. He was buried the same day in his chapel at Aachen."[35]

The world of Charlemagne's day knew that his death marked the passing of a colossus, a king who bestrode Europe with a firm and unmistakable step, and one the likes of which the world was not to see for many years to come. The impact of the empire that Charlemagne built, and the intellectual and spiritual renaissance that he fostered, was minimized upon his death by this very fact: there was no one to fill his boots, certainly not his direct heirs. Yet *he* soon became a legend, and his dream of a unified Christian empire spanning all of Europe (and some day the whole world) informed the ballads of troubadours, the chivalry of medieval knights, and the ambition of the better sort of European kings (though these were few and far between). Charlemagne's shadow would overspread Europe in the centuries after his death as his armies overspread Europe during his lifetime.

The immediate geo-political impact of his death, however, was far less noteworthy. He was succeeded by his eldest surviving son, Louis, who became known as 'the Pious.' This was not a compliment in the middle ages (one is not sure it has ever been a compliment). He was seen by his contemporaries as one a bit too devoted to religion and thus a weak ruler, which he was. During his reign he apportioned the empire between his three sons – in the misguided Frankish way – with the oldest, Lothair, designated as heir-apparent and given

[35] Wilson; 130.

the central portion of the Empire, Pepin receiving the Western Frankish Kingdom (Neutria), and Louis becoming the King of the Germans in the Eastern Frankish Empire (Austrasia). As was to be expected, the brothers fought one another – and fought their father, at one point forcing him to abdicate – and the Carolingian Empire began its descent into the tribal warfare and petty dukedoms which it replaced in the late 8th Century.

> The great empire of Charlemagne was divided at his death (in A.D. 814) among his three sons one of whom had France, another Italy, and the third Germany. In forty-five years afterwards we find seven kingdoms, instead of three France, Navarre, Provence, Burgundy, Lorraine, Germany, and Italy. In a few years more there were twenty-nine hereditary fiefs. And as early as the tenth century France itself was split up into fifty-five independent sovereignties; and these small sovereignties were again divided into dukedoms and baronies. All these dukes and barons, however, acknowledged the King of France as their liege lord; yet he was not richer or more powerful than some of the dukes who swore fealty to him. The Duke of Burgundy at one time had larger territories and more power than the King of France himself. So that the central authority of kings was merely nominal; their power extended scarcely beyond the lands they individually controlled. And all the countries of Europe were equally ruled by petty kings. [36]

Later occupants of the Carolingian purple included Charles the Bald, Charles the Fat, Charles the Simple and Louis the Incompetent – a telling tale as to the caliber of Charlemagne's descendents in comparison to himself. "The dregs of the Carlovingian race no longer exhibited and symptoms of virtue or power, and the ridiculous epithets of the *bald,* the *stammerer*, the *fat*, and the *simple*, distinguished the tame and uniform feature of a crowd of kings alike deserving of oblivion."[37] Once again the former territories of the mighty Roman Empire were without effective civil leadership, at least of a centralized form. And once again the Roman Church would attempt to step into the void.

[36] http://crusades-medieval.blogspot.com/2009/04/division-of-charlemagnes-empire.html
[37] Gibbon; 41.

Session 3: **Augustine Diluted**

Text Reading: **II Timothy 1:13 – 2:7**

"Gottschalk…recognized that the Church
carried a Semi-Pelagian heart
beneath its deceiving cloak of Augustinian formulas."
(J. L. Neve)

Famous men never lack for posthumous adherents. In modern times, it seems that no Republican candidate for political office can get by without attempting to set himself up as the spiritual heir of Ronald Reagan. This is not new to American politics; every political cycle has seen self-comparisons of current candidates to George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, or Theodore Roosevelt. Within evangelical Christianity, Charles Hadden Spurgeon is claimed as the ancestor of numerous different denominational groups in spite of the fact that he was baptistic, and staunchly Calvinist. As time passes the memory of a religious or political leader becomes more selective; people read a few excerpts from the volumes of writings left behind, like what they read, and adopt the author as their forebear. Such was the case in the Early Middle Ages with the great theologian Augustine. He was the official theologian of every Olympic Games held during that period (just kidding). But he was everyman's theologian, and *the* authoritative voice through the centuries from his death in AD 430.

The problem with all such hero worship is that successive generations tend to distort the actual teachings or principles of the man they so ardently claim to be their own. With Augustine the sheer volume of his writings made it difficult to master the theologian's thought comprehensively. Add to this the medieval tendency to study those who have studied Augustine – and so on with each generation of disciples – and before too long no one really knows what *Augustine* actually said on the matter. Occasionally a theologian arose who attempted not only to study Augustine, but to promote clear Augustinian

doctrine. In spite of the official approbation of the Church toward Augustine, such purists were almost always declared heretical, and silenced. This pattern began in the 9th Century and continued until the Protestant Reformation, when the revivified voice of Augustine was carried by far too many scholars for Rome to put down.

A disconnect arose in Western Christianity between the *doctrine* of Augustine and the *ecclesiology* of Augustine. The 5th Century theologian was a devout son of the Church, and looked to the Church as the final authority on orthodoxy. Protestants have long struggled with Augustine's words in his *Epistle Against the Manachæans*: "I should not have believed the Gospel unless moved to do so by the authority of the Church." In ecclesiastical controversies Augustine always came down on the side of a strong, centralized Church as the mother of all believers – both in birth and in nurture. Although the Catholic Church had not yet developed in Augustine's day the *sacramentalism* that would so influence the lives of all Europeans during the Middle Ages, there are sufficient texts from his writings to support the thesis that these innovations would have met with his approval. That is, until one studies Augustine's *theology*, much of which absolutely precludes the notion that divine grace is dispensed through the Church's sacraments.

In the centuries following the pontificate of Gregory the Great, the sacraments became the heart and soul of the Catholic Church, and of European Christendom. In *practice*, the Church had departed from Augustine *in theory*, but not necessarily from Augustine *in practice*. But as is so often the case, practice trumps theory, and the Catholic Church departed further and further from the theology of Augustine while continuing to hold up the increasingly hypocritical banner of Augustinianism. "The spirit of Gregory for the first time joined issue with the spirit of Augustine, and it carried the day."[38] It would not be until the 13th Century that a theologian would arise able to give the Church a new system

[38] Seeburg; Volume 2, 32.

rivaling Augustine's in theological and philosophical depth, while also granting theoretical legitimacy to the Church's semi-Pelagian practices. That theologian was Thomas Aquinas, and his theological system displaced Augustine's as 'the official theology of the Catholic Church.'

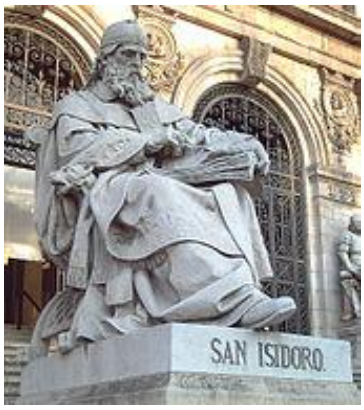
The Carolingian Renaissance so stimulated academic pursuits in a land long devoid of any such activity, that even the political chaos that ensued upon Charlemagne's death did not immediately chill the intellectual climate. The cathedral schools continued to flourish and, remarkably, additional impetus for philosophical study would come into Western Europe from the Muslim world via Moorish Spain. However, the same aversion to innovative thought prevailed through the 9th Century as had dominated the little theological study prior to Charlemagne's era. Nonetheless any intellectual activity will foster disagreement – only in ignorance is to be found bliss – and the post-Charlemagne era was marked by several important theological controversies that served to solidify the position of the Catholic Church on its long journey to the Reformation.

The Spanish Controversy:

The first such controversy is interesting in that it reflects the perennial 'need' to adapt Christianity to its surrounding culture. Historians refer to the particular issue as the **Adoptionist** Controversy, and it arose in the late 8th Century out of the Catholic remnant still living in newly-conquered Islamic Spain. "To what extent the Adoptionism of Elipandus, bishop of Toledo, and his followers was influenced by Mohammedan thought and a desire to present Christianity in a form as acceptable as possible to the cultured Saracens that ruled the country, is a question on which scholars are divided."[39] The claim that Jesus was the eternal Son of God has remained the most offensive tenet of Christianity to adherents of both Judaism and Islam. "Of all the doctrines of

[39] Newman, Albert Henry; *A Manual of Church History*, *Volume 1*; 356-357.

Christianity, none was so repugnant to Moslem feelings, or excited their ridicule more than the Divine Sonship of Christ."[40] Perhaps in response to this, Elipandus, along with Bishop Felix of Urgel, theorized that according to His divine sonship Christ was not adopted, but according to His human sonship He was. In this they were able to appeal to excerpts from notable Church Fathers such as Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and more recently, Isidore of Seville, whose 'sentences' on



Isidore of Seville (*c.* 560-636)

Augustine were the essential theological textbook of the age. The Spanish theologians, however, made some dangerous remarks that were bound to be condemned by Catholic orthodoxy. "According to his humanity he is the Son of God 'not by generation, but by adoption; not by nature, but by grace.'"[41] This was still more than Judaism claimed for Moses, or Islam for Mohammed, but it was too much for many leading theologians of the day, including Alcuin. Adoptionism was condemned by three Frankish councils convened by Charlemagne. While it may have been nothing more than an honest attempt to wrestle with the mystery of the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ, its proximity to a growing Muslim culture inevitably tinctures it with 'acculturalization' – modifying orthodox doctrine in an attempt to make it more palatable to a hostile culture. One passage alone should have sufficed to refute the view that Jesus was not the Son of God *by generation*,

> *And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.* (Luke 1:35)

[40] Kurtz, J. H., *History of the Christian Church*, *Volume 1*; 359.
[41] Newman; 357.

Transubstantiation:

Modern evangelicals have often wondered where the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation came from – who ever dreamed up the notion that the bread of the Lord's Supper became the literal flesh of Jesus Christ, and the wine His blood? The origins of the doctrine itself actually postdate the practice whereby the priest consecrated the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord. It is probable that the practice itself arose more in accommodation to the illiterate and pagan communicants – people who had been steeped in pagan mystery cults for countless generations – than from any intentionality on the part of the leaders of the early Church. What is clear from the historical records is that the average parishioner in the Carolingian era firmly believed that the consecrated bread that he ate was *literally*, though not *visibly*, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the wine His blood.

For the ignorant the simple formula *Hoc est corpus meum*, being Latin, meant nothing more than what Martin Luther would later substitute in jest: *Hocus pocus.* But the parishioner understood the ritual meal as a 'partaking with idols,' and so the idea that this wafer and that wine miraculously and mysteriously became flesh and blood held no philosophical or intellectual difficulty. He merely accepted it as it was delivered to him from the priest, and came to understand the ceremony as the central ritual of this Christian religion to which his tribe had converted.

But theologians are incapable of leaving any practice to be long without doctrinal underpinning, even if they have to build that doctrinal foundation after the practical fact. Thus in the middle of the 9th Century a monk by the name of **Paschasius Radbertus** put pen to parchment to theologically and philosophically define what 'happened' when the priest uttered the words of consecration during the Eucharist. In AD 831 Radbertus published *De sanguine et corpora Domini* –'Of the Blood and Body of the Lord' – written in a popular and pious

style, in which he became the first to coin the word 'transubstantiation' to describe what happened to the Eucharistic elements after consecration.

The meaning of transubstantiation is contained within the word itself, a combination of the prefix 'trans' – meaning *across* or *over* and signifying change – and 'substance' – being the philosophical essence of a thing. The 'accidents' of the Eucharistic meal, the bread and the wine, did not change form before, during, or after the consecration and eating of the meal. The bread still tasted like bread, and the wine did not savor of blood upon the tongues of the communicants. This phenomenon, Radbertus asserted, was necessary so that *faith* would be operative during the meal, and also so that Christians would not be exposed to the censure of their pagan neighbors for cannibalism. The transformation was a *mystery*, not a *miracle*, which is what it would be if the bread and wine turned into flesh and blood visibly. Besides, Radbertus notes, most people would be quite disgusted with a meal of raw flesh and blood. He credited the mystery to "Divine condescension, which had regard to the infirmity of man and his shrinking from flesh and blood, and which, besides, would cut off all occasion for the heathen to blaspheme."[42]

Radbertus described at length that the change wrought by consecration took place within the *essence* or *substance* of the elements so that even though the eye still, and the tongue still tasted, bread and wine, in reality these accidents masked the true substantial nature of flesh and blood. "He taught that the bread and the wine, as far as color and taste are concerned, remain. If they did not, there would be no room for faith. But within they are changed, as to their substance, into the body and blood of Christ, - even the same body in which He suffered and was crucified."[43] Thus was the practice of the 'real presence' of the Lord in the Eucharist translated into theological doctrine and the notion of the

[42] Kurtz; 361.
[43] Fisher; *History of Christian Doctrine*; 207.

Lord's Supper as a *sacrifice* gained momentum. This was, of course, even more appealing to nominal believers converting from paganism.

Radbertus' doctrine of substantial change in the elements was a departure from Augustine, who viewed the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist to be spiritual, and the bread and wine to be symbolic and memorial. To be sure, Radbertus did not diverge entirely from Augustine on the matter, and sought to maintain the spiritualism of Augustine's doctrine with the realism of transubstantiation. Seeburg summarizes thus,

> The idea of Radbertus is: In the Lord's Supper there is both a symbol and a reality. The outward visible and sensible forms, which remain despite the transformation, make it a *symbol*; the body of Christ, which is present, is the *verity*. But only he receives the body who believes that it is offered in these symbolic forms. It is, therefore, through (meritorious) faith, or the right understanding of this symbol, that the body is received.[44]

What opposition arose against the brazen philosophical innovation of Radbertus was tame at best. Charles the Bald commissioned another monk of the same abbey as Radbertus – named Ratramnus to keep things quite confusing – to write a treatise in answer to Radbertus. Ratramnus attempted to rein in the excesses of Radbertus' doctrine by emphasizing the spiritual nature of the Lord's presence in the Supper, thus returning the focus to the symbolic nature of the elements. But his terminology does not differ significantly from that of Radbertus; speaking of the bread and the wine, Ratramnus writes, "They are figures according to the visible form; but according to the invisible substance, *i.e.*, the power of the divine word, the true body and blood of Christ truly exists…The Lord is known to be present in some manner, and that manner is in figure and in image, in order that the verity may be felt to be the real thing."[45]

Generally, however, Radbertus' views were too far off the path of Augustinian symbolism for most of his contemporaries. Yet he had his finger on

[44] Seeburg; 36.
[45] *Idem*.

the pulse of the people, as Seeburg cogently summarizes, "The future belonged to Radbertus, for he had the praxis (*i.e.,* practice) of the church upon his side."

The Hot Button: Predestination & Free Will:

The foregoing theological controversies of transubstantiation and adoptionism were mild compared to the controversies that raged during the early centuries of the Church's history. They are, however, representative of an age fairly anemic in terms of theological stimulation, an age in which the traditions of the Fathers were held to be as sacred as the writings of Scripture and deviation to be as the sin of divination. Augustine held the position of honor in the patristic pantheon but, as we have already noted, he was not always diligently followed. Finally, in the 9th Century, there arose a learned monk of the Abbey of Orbais who actually read Augustine thoroughly, and who proceeded to expound and defend the 5th Century theologian's most significant and controversial doctrine: *divine predestination*. The old debate between Augustine and Pelagius raged again in the midst of the Dark Ages, a foretaste of the later controversy between the teachings of Calvin and those of Arminius.

Gottschalk, whose name is Old German for 'servant of God,' was born the son of a Saxon lord who dedicated (*oblates*) the child as an infant to the monastic ministry. Although we know nothing more of Gottschalk's family than his father's name – Count Berno – we can deduce from this infant dedication either that he was born somewhere down the line in terms of sons, or that Berno's wife had been barren for a time and the couple wished to express their gratitude to God by dedicating their son to His service. It is unlikely even in the latter case, however, that Gottschalk was the eldest son. In any event, his life was turned toward Christian ministry before he was old enough to choose, and when he reached maturity he had already decided it was *not* the life he wished to live. Unfortunately the imperial laws concerning *oblates* – children dedicated to Christian service as infants – was solidly enforced, and the best Gottschalk could

attain was the right to relocate to the monastery of Orbais, where he remained until the controversy erupted. Consigned to unwanted monastic life, Gottschalk apparently responded by devoting himself to intense intellectual activity, focusing on theology and philosophy, and particularly the writings of Augustine. He definitely possessed the intellect for the task, but he apparently did not have the right temperament for theological debate. By all accounts he was combative and this put him at a severe disadvantage when the storms began to brew over his theological writings. Sadly those writings are lost to us; but the excerpts that exist in the documents of his opponents, and the gist of his adversaries' arguments, infer that Gottschalk was the most *Augustinian* Augustinian of his day. This fact was manifest in the strongest terms by his writings on predestination.

In the 5th Century Augustine joined battle with Pelagius over the issue of the sovereignty of God in man's salvation, versus the ability of man to act of his own volition in the way of salvation. Augustine taught the absolute sovereignty of God in no uncertain terms, and the church of his day acknowledged his position as biblical and orthodox. In subsequent minor conflicts the Catholic Church always turned to the Augustinian position against views that supported 'free will' in the sense of a sinner's ability to willingly convert. But as the sacramental system of the Church, and the priestly dispensation of grace via the sacraments, grew in practice the *practical* view evolved into a Semi-Pelagian mixture of divine and human synergy. By the 9th Century, while there was still an Augustinian 'voice' in the Catholic Church, the daily rituals of the Mass and penance and indulgences fairly demanded a Semi-Pelagian soul. "It is evident that for the sake of maintaining the efficacy of the sacraments they preferred to modify in a Semi-Pelagian way the Augustinian doctrine of unconditional election, without appreciating, perhaps, the extent of their deviation from it."[46]

[46] Fisher; 206.

This phenomenon continued unchecked, until someone came along to assert the true Augustinian teaching.

> On no Christian doctrine was the Augustinian synthesis inherited by the ninth century as ambiguous as on predestination, and on no doctrine was the theological controversy as bitter. It was 'the most animated controversy of the ninth century.' What was embarrassing about Augustine on the real presence in the Eucharist was his vagueness; what was embarrassing about him on predestination was his clarity.[47]

Gottschalk discovered the sovereignty of God in Augustine's writings, though it was not all that hard to do – one merely had to read them. But the Catholic Church had covered Augustine's teachings in layer upon layer of ritual, in which divine grace was mediated through the priest to work in conjunction with man's free will. Gottschalk's opponents were fearful of his teaching, no less than Arminians are today, thinking that the doctrine of absolute sovereignty would hinder good works, and lead to complacency among both professing believers and unbelievers alike. It was the same argument that Paul rhetorically put in the mouth of his adversaries, "*You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'*" (Romans 9:19) But to Paul, and later to Augustine and Gottschalk, sin had rendered man incapable of good works in the sight of God. "Gottschalk denied to the free will any capacity to do anything good apart from the grace of God. Without grace, Augustine had said, freedom was not truly freedom at all, but rebellion, and Gottschalk agreed."[48]

Gottschalk was vehemently opposed by Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims and friend and advisor to the Frankish king, Charles the Bald. The impact of absolute predestination (and, as we will see, its corollary of definite atonement) was destructive of the entire ecclesiastical system, and equally so of the power and influence of men like Hincmar. "The antagonists of Gottschalk saw in this

[47] Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*; 80-81.
[48] *Ibid.*; 83.

doctrine no place for good works, priest, or sacrament, nor for the whole ecclesiastical system."[49]

The doctrine of absolute divine sovereignty is far reaching in its implications. First, if divine grace is absolute then it is unconditional except for the purpose and pleasure of the divine will. In other words, absolute predestination accompanies the doctrine of absolute sovereignty – for there is no other cause of any man's salvation than that he was *"chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world."* Gottschalk was faced with the time-worn argument that God elected men on the basis of His *prescience* – His foreknowledge that such men would, in time, believe. But Gottschalk responded appropriately that this view implies mutability in God – that the divine will would *respond* to a cause outside of itself was to him an untenable and impossible position. "This [*i.e.*, divine election] cannot be based upon the divine prescience, since God would then be mutable and dependent upon the temporal. Prescience merely accompanies predestination; by it the justice of the latter is attested."[50]

Second, if divine sovereignty is absolute and election unconditional, this implies that it is particular. In other words, divine grace in salvation was not meted out to all mankind for it was not intended for all mankind. The omnipotence of God demands that the exercise of His grace be fully efficacious, accomplishing without fail the purpose for which it was sent forth. Since the instrumentation of divine grace to man's salvation was the death of Jesus Christ, the conclusion is necessary that Christ could not have died for all men, but only for the elect. This corollary was especially repugnant to Hincmar and the rest of Gottschalk's adversaries, as it cut to the very center of the sacramental system, and undermined the very concept of Christendom itself. Hincmar saw that "the sacraments would be robbed of their value, becoming a mere form and trifling; the motive to good works, *i.e.*, the thought of rewards and punishment, would be

[49] Neve; 179.
[50] Seeburg; 31.

removed, and thus the moral life, as they understood it, would be destroyed."[51] But Gottschalk's teaching was strictly and unmistakably Augustinian on this point,

> All those whom God desired to save were saved through redemption by the blood of Christ, and none of them would perish. For the saving will of God always accomplished its ends. To say that Christ had suffered for all men, including even Antichrist, was an unheard of novelty and presumptuous.[52]

This controversy over predestination illustrates just where the Church was toward the end of the first millennium. The 'official' doctrine of Catholic Christianity was Augustinianism, and that Gottschalk's teaching was "genuine Augustinian doctrine cannot be denied."[53] Nonetheless, even Gottschalk's supporters were tainted with the desire to preserve the efficacy and influence of the Church's sacraments, and their support was half-hearted at best. They were Semi-Pelagians; the whole Church, it would seem, was Semi-Pelagian in spite of protestations to the contrary. Gottschalk was condemned at several synods convened by Charles the Bald. He was "delivered for punishment to Hincmar, in whose district his cloister lay. At Chiersy, AD 849, he was terribly scourged and condemned to life-long imprisonment."[54] For twenty long years, until his death in 869, Gottschalk refused all pressure to recant his views, for "the controversy between Gottschalk and his adversaries could not be compromised, for he was an Augustinian and they were semi-Augustinians."[55] This controversy, the keenest in the 9th Century if not the whole of the Dark Ages, was the first great challenge of biblical theology against the sacerdotal institutionalism of the growing Catholic Church. "The spirit of Gregory for the first time joined issue with the spirit of Augustine, and it carried the day."[56]

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[51] Seeburg; 32.
[52] Pelikan; 91-92.
[53] Seeburg; 31.
[54] *Ibid.*; 32.
[55] *Idem.*
[56] *Idem.*

Session 4: **The Rise of the Schoolmen**

Text Reading: **Colossians 2:6 - 8**

"The history of Philosophy is the history of
never-changing questions
and ever-changing answers."
(W. T. Jones *History of Western Thought*)

The human mind cannot stop thinking, for it was created after the image of the One who is all knowledge. Hence, when the scope of intellectual investigation is bounded by both tradition and decree, the mind turns in upon itself – or at least upon that limited content of study – and consequently *over*-investigates the subject matter beyond the point of revelation and reason. One contemporary wag put it humorously, "We will know more and more about less and less, until someday we will know everything about nothing."[57] In the Early Middle Ages this phenomenon meant a thorough, reasoned, and logical analysis of every doctrine of the Church – reviewing and cataloging the input of Scripture and of the 'fathers' – without any desire or attempt to advance upon previous orthodoxy. The goal of scholarship in this era was to show the *reasonableness* of Christian doctrine rather than to attempt any *development* of that doctrine. The result has come to be called **Scholasticism**, and the theologians who guided this stage of Church History are known as the **Schoolmen**.

Scholasticism has received a bad rap from history, due largely to its own extravagances and errors in its later years; but not entirely with justice. On the negative side, there is the old query supposedly first formulated by the medieval Schoolmen, "How many angels can occupy the head of a pin?"(some versions ask 'how many angels can 'dance' on the head of a pin?' but the thought of angels dancing was considered to risqué for American Baptist sensibilities…). The question itself is fictitious, meant to be illustrative of the silliness of

[57] Source unknown.

intellectual investigation during the later generations of the Scholastic Era. It was first raised not during the 10th, 11th, or 12th Centuries – the formative and adolescent years of the Schoolmen – but rather in the 18th Century by British author Isaac D'Israeli, the father of future British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, in a satirical history book poking fun at the follies of medieval theologians. But the question soon became axiomatic for Scholastic Theology, though it was never actually posed by a scholastic theologian, simply because the intellectual activity of that age did degenerate into similar ridiculous questions and meaningless intellectual rabbit trails.

Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848)

This was not due to any deficiency in the mental capacity of the theologians of this age – it can not be attributed to lead in the water or asbestos insulation. Some of the greatest minds in Church History lived during these centuries: Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas to name just a few. No, the degeneracy of theological thought is attributable to the strict limitations placed upon any development of doctrine – basically, *none* – by both the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the settled opinion of the vast majority of the theologians themselves. "Scholasticism was an application of reason to theology, not in order to revise the creed or to explore for new truth, but to systematize and prove the existing beliefs."[58] To be sure, intellectual pursuit for novelty's sake is also very dangerous – and would itself characterize other periods of Church History – but the strictures placed upon theological investigation by the time of the Carolingian Renaissance tended to dampen true intellectual growth, and to solidify error wherever the Church's doctrines were wrong. We have already seen how the Church's practice was in serious disconnect with the Church's professed doctrine (Semi-Pelagian practice under a theoretically Augustinian doctrine). Hence it is the case that the

[58] Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine;* 212.

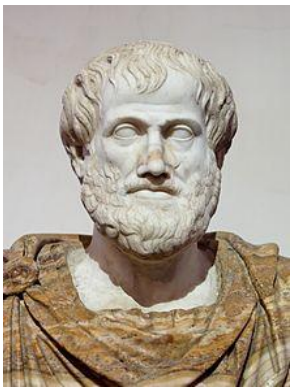
Schoolmen were already exercising their intellectual skills on a crumbling foundation, and one that they were strenuously prohibited from repairing.

"The tenth century was the dark age in medieval history."[59] The student of history ought always to beware of such short, summary judgments as this. Sadly, as it applies to intellectual and theological life in Western Europe, George Fisher is as correct as he is blunt. It seems as though when Gottschalk was silenced, so was thought itself. Newman elaborates with regard to the period from the end of the 9th Century to the middle of the 11th Century,

> The beginning of the present period found theological science in a degenerate and moribund condition. The achievements of the preceding periods were not even being properly conserved, and advance was out of the question. The impulse given by Charlemagne to the revival of learning was never wholly lost in the time of the feudalistic disintegration and demoralization; and the age of the Crusades…brought with it a reawakening of interest in theological science…The doctrinal controversies of the period are relatively unimportant.[60]

Remarkably it was, in fact, the ongoing contact between Catholic Christians and Muslims through close proximity (Spain) and through mercantile exchange (Italy and the Frankish kingdoms) that finally *re*-stimulated intellectual activity in Western Europe. This activity, once excited, would of necessity take the form of theological inquiry, as by this time 'Christendom' had settled itself over essentially the entirety of the former Western Roman Empire. Islam had nothing, of course, to contribute to Christian theology *per se*; the influence was rather in the preservation and perpetuation of *Greek philosophy* by Muslim scholars in the East and in Spain. This is not to say that the intellectual community of the West was entirely ignorant of the ancient Greek philosophers; but since the time of Augustine the predominant influence was that of Plato with an admixture of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. Lost to the West were the writings of Plato's great student, Aristotle – *the Philosopher* - as he was fondly

[59] Fisher; 209.
[60] Newman; 474.



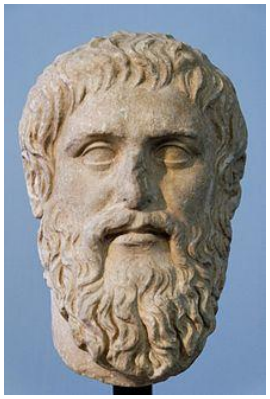
Aristotle (384-322 BC)

known by generations of his disciples in the East (and later as well in the West). Aristotle's writings somehow remained in Greek, never translated into Latin as were those of Plato and Zeno. Hence as that ancient language disappeared from Western scholarship, so also did the philosophy of Aristotle; at least until he was reintroduced via Islamic scholars in Palestine and Spain. This infusion of Aristotelian philosophy into Catholic theology became the life-blood of medieval Scholasticism.

> The term scholasticism (or the teachings of the schools) has long been used to designate the formal theologizing conducted according to the categories of the Aristotelian philosophy and with the use of the deductive method, that prevailed during the Middle Ages and later.[61]

A Brief Philosophy Primer:

"The great philosophical problem of the Middle Ages was that of Nominalism and Realism."[62] The question has to do with the relationship between 'universals' and 'accidents' or, in laymen's terms, the correspondence between what man perceives through his senses and the reality of the things themselves. This investigation is often typified by the silly question, 'If a tree falls in the forest with nobody around to hear it, does it make a noise?' Plato would say 'yes.' Plato, the patron saint of Realism, which philosophy holds to a direct correspondence between what man perceives – the 'accidents' or particulars of a thing – and the essential and universal reality of the concept. Plato taught that the universal existed *before* the concrete things themselves, or *ante rem* (Latin for 'prior reality').



Plato (427-347 BC)

[61] Newman; 474.
[62] Fisher; 213.

> According to Plato man carries within himself a conception of the idea of an absolute good and beautiful [*sic*]. He cannot have attained this impression by experience since the absolute good does not exist in this sensible world. Rather, the soul has viewed this idea in its pre-existence and has retained a memory of it. Reason is the immortal part of the soul and constitutes its very essence. The rational perception of the soul, the ideas (universals), therefore, possess reality, since they are recollections of eternal and unchangeable corporeal though spiritual objects.[63]

Platonic thought lent itself most readily to Christian theology, with all universals resolving themselves in the mind of God, and all particulars being creations of His hand. Thus the great 5th Century theologian Augustine formulated his theology along definite Platonic lines, and *neo*-Platonism was the dominant philosophy for the ensuing half millennium. One might even hear the echoes of Plato in the more philosophical writings of the apostle Paul, such as this section from his First Epistle to the Corinthians,

> *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.* (I Corinthians 15:46-49)

And the following passage from Hebrews also connects an underlying reality both with and before the physical manifestation on earth,

> *For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."* (Hebrews 8:3-5)

But extreme Realism can lead to a diminution of the value of particulars and, in theology, this tends to lead to mysticism and pantheism. Thus Aristotle's

[63] Neve; 189.

modifications to his master's philosophy, once the Philosopher was 'rediscovered' in the West, proved attractive to many theologians. Aristotle believed that the universal existed only in the particular – *en re* ('in reality') - as 'humanity exists only in man.' This modification of Realism is often called **Conceptualism** and was espoused by the great Scholastic theologians Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas. But this view also has its drawbacks, most notably in that it seems to teach that reality cannot exist apart from the particular forms which it takes. Such a view becomes a direct attack upon the preexistence of God and of Christ, of the elect of God, and of the nature of prophecy.

A third philosophical view, though one that had few adherents among Catholic theologians, was **Nominalism**. This view, derived from the Latin for 'name,' holds that there is no reality apart from the common consensus applied to a particular through the giving of a name. For instance, 'green' is green only because the word 'green' has been given and universally accepted to indicate the 'color' green. "Nominalism was the Stoic doctrine that universals are abstractions of the understanding, with no objective reality, being merely common names attached to individuals having like qualities."[64] This is *universalis post rem* – the universals follow reality, with reality being designated through the common name given. Nominalism did not gain a significant audience in the philosophical community until the 18th Century writings of Immanuel Kant, and its theological 'day in the Sun' would not arrive until German existentialism arrived in the 20th Century. The philosophical and theological battleground of the Middle Ages was occupied almost entirely along a spectrum ranging from Plato to Aristotle. "Either type of realism was welcomed by the Church for its apologetic value. For the reality of the Church's doctrines seemed to be guaranteed if their reasonableness could be effectively demonstrated. The moderate realism of the Aristotelian type, however, was found to be best conformable to the interest of the Church and the needs of the

[64] Fisher; 214.

time."[65] Historically the two theologians standing at each pole were Augustine (Platonic) and Aquinas (Aristotelian).

The attractive power of Aristotle resolved in the Philosopher's exaltation of human reason, for he was more a natural and empirical scientist than a metaphysical philosopher. Locked into the centuries-old theological formulations handed down from the time of the Fathers, medieval thinkers were challenged by the *dialectical* method of applying Reason to Doctrine to prove the rationality and reasonableness of the tenets of faith. "If the traditional dogma was an inviolable legacy, the spirit of the age could be exercised upon it in no other way than in presenting by dialectic methods the evidence of its harmony with sound reason."[66]

The terms 'dialectics' and 'dialectical method' represent a very broad category of philosophical thought ranging from Socrates to Karl Marx. "Dialectics [is] the art of proving a thing through logical consideration."[67] The *dia* prefix indicates the participation of *two* in the search, but frequently the second participant was a fictitious character used by the philosophical author as a foil against whom the 'truth' of the author's philosophy was driven home. The dialectical method does, however, assume the presence of two divergent views, each seeking through reason to arrive at one truth. One of the most familiar dialectic in the history of Philosophy was that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich **Hegel**. Hegel's Dialectic of History has been simplified to the Thesis vs. Antihesis yields Synthesis that often aptly describes the flow of historical events. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels adopted Hegelian dialectic in their development of Communism.

G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831)

[65] Neve; 189.
[66] Seeburg; *The History of Doctrines*; 35.
[67] Neve; 188.

The example of Marxist Communism goes to show that the two sides of the dialectic need not be 'friends,' as it were, in the pursuit of a common truth; they may and often are mortal adversaries. But this was a later development in the philosophical world; in the Scholastic Era the dialectic was established and employed by the schoolmen under the rubric of men of intellectual integrity pursuing the noble goal of Truth. This methodology produced some admirable theological treatises so long as the dialectic was contained within the individual philosopher's own thought system and writings. Sadly, when this-and-such theological philosophy became public, the author soon found that real-life antitheses were often far from friendly co-travelers on the high road to Knowledge. Thus the Scholastic Era, like the Carolingian before it and the ancient Patristic long before that, was a battleground of theological controversy and personal animosity. Ultimately the general historical judgment with regard to Scholasticism was negative, as summarized here by Albert Henry Newman,

> *a.* [Scholasticism] sharpened the logical faculties without furnishing fresh materials for thought. The outward form of theology came to be regarded as of supreme importance, the spirit of Christianity being lost sight of.
> *b.* Scholasticism being a product of papal Christianity and partaking of its spirit, became one of the greatest bulwarks of the papacy and has constituted one of the chief obstacles to the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church.
> *c.* The frivolousness and formalism of mediæval theology brought about reactions which resulted in evangelical revolt, mysticism, humanism, and finally in the Protestant Reformation.[68]

Yet in spite of this wholly negative, and largely accurate, portrayal of Scholasticism, there were some shining stars in the firmament of medieval theology. C. Gregg Singer, late professor of Church History at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, cogently described the paradoxical nature of the Scholastic Era: "Scholasticism was the product of magnificent intellectual industry, interest, and devotion. At the same time it was a complex and massive

[68] Newman; 481.

structure with serious defects which brought about its downfall."[69] Neve is even more favorable,

> Scholasticism was not merely an unfruitful formalism. It was a truly creative movement. It fused the theology of revelation and the ancient philosophy into a natural theology and produced a world-view of remarkable breadth and completeness. It was remarkable in spite of its open character of compromise (theology and philosophy), for it derived everything from God and then summarized everything again in Him.[70]

In truth, Neve speaks of only a portion of the Scholastic Era, for as time passed philosophy tended to displace theology, and the 'angels on the head of a pin' type considerations became more prevalent. The early stages of the movement were more densely populated with the better sort of theologians, and it is to their lives and contributions we now turn.

Anselm of Canterbury: ***The Father of Scholasticism***

The honorary title of 'Father' of any movement is often disputed, and that is the case with regard to Scholasticism. **Anselm** (1033-1109) shares the accolade with his younger contemporary **Peter Abelard** (1079-1142), but the devotion and piety of the former tips the scale in his favor relative to that of the latter. Both were brilliant men, though Anselm was by far the more conservative, Abelard the radical and liberal thinker. These two pathfinders among the Schoolmen contributed mightily both to the dialectical movement that they were undoubtedly unaware was developing, and to the overall corpus of theological writings belonging to all generations of Christians.

Anselm was born of minor nobility in the Kingdom of Arles; he first appears on the historical scene as the Abbot of the influential Benedictine monastery at Bec in Normandy, and later as the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was the head of the English branch of Catholic Christianity during the

[69] Class notes; GPTS Medieval Church History.
[70] Neve; 188.

tumultuous reign of Henry I, second son of William of Normandy. Anselm's loyalty to the Roman centre becomes manifest through his frequent and almost violent disagreements with Henry (violent from Henry's side, not so from Anselm's). But the political side of Anselm's life will be taken up in a later session in which the role of the Church vis-à-vis the State is once again taken into view.

Anselm's abiding fame rests with his publication of three monumental treatises, still required reading in both Roman Catholic and Protestant theological seminaries. The purest of these in terms of the scholastic dialectical methodology is *Cur Deus Homo*, or 'Why God (became) Man?' *Cur Deus Homo* is a treatise on the purpose and necessity of the Incarnation for the salvation of man. "Read as an essay in speculative divinity, the treatise was a virtuoso performance with few rivals in the history of Christian thought."[71] In this masterful work, Anselm illustrates the nascent scholastic method by attempting to show the rational necessity of God becoming Man, without appealing to Scripture. Anselm did not approach the matter, to be sure, from the perspective of an atheist or even an agnostic. His premises – the reality of a holy God, the sin of man, the necessity of salvation – are all quite biblical and quite evident in *Cur Deus Homo*. He simply tried to expound upon the reasonableness of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, and of the redemption that comes from God through it.

The dialectical method is brought out through a hypothetical conversation between Anselm and a young man, Boso, who is asking questions regarding the nature of the Incarnation. From the first Book, Chapter 1, we read,

> Therefore, since many desire to consider this subject, and, though it seems very difficult in the investigation, it is yet plain to all in the solution, and attractive for the value and beauty of the reasoning; although what ought to be sufficient has been said by the holy fathers and their successors, yet I will take pains to disclose

[71] Pelikan; 106-107.

> to inquirers what God has seen fit to lay open to me. And since investigations, which are carried on by question and answer, are thus made more plan to many, and especially to less quick minds, and on that account are more gratifying, I will take to argue with me one of those persons who agitate this subject; one, who among the rest impels me more earnestly to it, so that in this way Boso may question and Anselm reply.[72]

The logical flow of the argument is made apparent by several exchanges between Anselm and Boso. It should be noted that Boso always gives the 'right' answer, which is characteristic of the dialectic methodology. Unfortunately, in real life, our adversaries and inquirers rarely cooperate so fully.

> **Anselm**: If man or angel always rendered to God his due, he would never sin.
> **Boso**: I cannot deny that.
> **Anselm**: Therefore to sin is nothing else than not to render God his due.
> **Boso**: What is the debt which we owe to God?
> **Anselm**: Every wish of a rational creature should be subject to the will of God.
> **Boso**: Nothing is more true.[73]

And later,

> **Anselm:** In the order of things, there is nothing less to be endured than that the creature should take away the honor due the Creator, and not restore what he has taken away.
> **Boso:** Nothing is more plain.
> **Anselm:** But there is no greater injustice suffered than that by which so great an evil must be endured.
> **Boso:** That, also, is plain.
> **Anselm:** I think, therefore, that you will not say that God ought to endure a thing than which no greater injustice is suffered, viz., that the creature should not restore to God what he has taken away.
> **Boso:** No; I think it should be wholly denied.[74]

[72] Anselm; *Cur Deus Homo*, translated from the Latin by Sidney Norton Deane, B. A. (LaSalle, IL: The Open Court Publishing Company; 1958); 179.
[73] Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*; Book 1, Chapter XI.
[74] *Cur Deus Homo*; Book 1, Chapter XIII.

Toward the end of Book 1 Anselm puts into the mouth of Boso his own creed with regard to intellectual, rational exercise. Anselm's famous motto, *credo ut intelligam* – 'I believe that I may understand' – manifested his view regarding the priority of Faith to Reason, and maintained the conservative position of those whose theology at all time sought to preserve the orthodoxy handed down from the fathers. The phrase itself comes from Anselm's work *Proslogium*, but here in *Cur Deus Homo* he speaks for Boso, "I come not for this purpose, to have you remove doubts from my faith, but to have you show me the reason for my confidence."[75]

Perhaps Anselm's most influential contribution to both the History of the Church and the History of Christian Doctrine came from his two apologetical works, *Proslogium* and *Monologium*. In the first, the author "aims at proving in a single argument the existence of God, and whatsoever we believe of God."[76] Thus Anselm lays out what has become known as the **Ontological Argument** for the existence of God. Through twenty-six chapters he sets forth and expounds upon his basic syllogism establishing the reasonableness of believing in God.

> **Premise**: It can be imagined a being greater than which there is none.
> **God must be that Being than which there is none greater**
> **Premise**: It is greater to exist in reality than merely to exist in thought.
> **Conclusion**: God must exist.

Both *Proslogium* and *Monologium* are written in a more devotional style reminiscent of Augustine's confessions, and thus do not technically fit the dialectical method of philosophical reasoning. Yet even in these Anselm pits his rational powers against Guanilon, the Fool, who 'responds' to Anselm in an Appendix to the two works: *In Behalf of the Fool*. Some of the more famous passages from *Proslogium* will illustrate the devotional tone set by its author.

[75] *Cur Deus Homo*; Book 1, Chapter XXV.
[76] Deane; 1.

> For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand (*credo ut intelligam*). For this also I believe, - that unless I believed, I should not understand. (*Proslogium*; Chapter I)

> And, indeed, we believe that thou are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. (*Proslogium*; Chapter II)

> I thank thee, gracious Lord, I thank thee; because what I formerly believed by thy bounty, I now so understand by thine illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that thou dost exist, I should not be able not to understand this to be true. (*Proslogium*; Chapter IV)

> It appears, then – nay, it is unhesitatingly declared that what is called God is not nothing; and that to this supreme Essence the name *God* is properly given. For every one who says that a God exists, whether one or more than one, conceives of him only as of some substance which he believes to be above every nature that is not God, and that he is to be worshipped of men because of his preeminent majesty, and to be appeased for man's own sake because of some imminent necessity. (*Monologium*; Chapter LXXIX)

Peter Abelard: Rebel Without a Cause

No theologian of the Scholastic Era was more fascinating, more dynamic, more eloquent, more radical and perhaps a bit unstable, than **Peter Abelard**. His dates overlap those of Anselm, but the two never crossed swords. Abelard was established as an instructor at the cathedral school of Paris in 1115, six years after the death of the famous Archbishop of Canterbury. The two would not have gotten along had their paths crossed, for Anselm was conservative to a fault, and Abelard seemed to relish nothing more than shaking the establishment cage. His dynamism and oratory gathered a large following to himself as a lecturer in Paris, and this unfortunately began the settled and inveterate animosity of the 'powers that be' against Abelard, that persisted to the end of his days.

Abelard did not help his own cause, however, either by his lectures, or by his writings. And he certainly did not endear himself to the conservative establishment by way of his illicit and ill-fated romance with Heloise, for which

he, sadly, most remembered. Heloise was the niece of Fulbert, the secular canon of the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. By most accounts it is recorded that Abelard took notice of the precocious Heloise – she was remarkable well-versed in the Classics for a woman in that era – and seduced her, even boasting afterward of his 'conquest.' Fulbert intervened and prohibited any further association between the two; Abelard persisted, and Heloise became pregnant. She was shuffled off to a convent in Brittany, where she gave birth to Abelard's son whom she names Astrolabius, after the ancient astronomical instrument.

Even though he secretly married her, Abelard ran hot and cold with regard to Heloise, and his continued pursuit and periodic abandonment of her angered her uncle. Fulbert resolved the issue by having Abelard forcibly castrated, thus ending Abelard's romantic adventures. He consequently entered the Abbey of Saint Denis. Heloise was forced to become a nun, eventually rising to the office of Abbess. She continued literary correspondence with Abelard until his death in 1142. Of the fate and life of their son, Astrolabius, there is no surviving record.

This episode in Abelard's life ruined his reputation both then and for generations since. By his own admission, and without any obvious repentance, he treated Heloise deplorably. Scripture speaks of man as being *"born to trouble as the spark flies upward"*; Abelard was self-igniting. Yet he was a brilliant scholar, and throughout his life protested a devout faith. His style was combative, however, as illustrated by one of his best-known works, *Sic et Non* – "Yes and No." In this controversial treatise, "a long list of isolated questions of doctrine are taken, and then there are grouped around them concordant or contradictory opinions from the Bible, the Fathers, the decrees and canons."[77] The whole venture was provocative, and apparently intended to be. It attacked the notion of a stable, solid body of doctrinal tradition in which the 'modern' theologian could safely rest and do his work of explication. "In Abelard the balance was

[77] Neve; 190.

lost between the devotional and the logical elements. In him the inquisitive spirit and the dialectic passion had the decided ascendency."[78] His intellectual prowess was undeniable and formidable, but his personal character fostered animosity and instability, rendering his academic accomplishments far less significant than they might otherwise have been. "He was strongly inclined toward rationalism and was combative in a high degree; but he had not the moral courage of which martyrs are made, and his career was an inglorious one."[79]

Because of his bent toward rationalism, Abelard would later become a favorite of Enlightenment scholars. But he, unlike they, remained a loyal and devoted son of the Church, never repudiating his humble faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his belief in ultimate salvation through faith. Abelard upset the establishment apple cart, and filleted the sacred traditions handed down from the Fathers; but he held the Bible in the highest regard. His raw intellect was probably more vibrant than that of Anselm, but his character diminished the impact of his work. Neve compares the two founders of Scholasticism,

> While Anselm demanded as the *condition sine qua non* the willing surrender to the doctrinal system as a whole, Abelard thought of a gradual trial by reason, by which the theologian arrives at complete comprehension of doctrines. Anselm says, *Credo ut intelligam*, because he considers the doctrine to be supernatural and feels that it can be comprehended only through a science of experience. Abelard says, *Intelligo ut credam*, because he considers a reasonable perception of the object of faith possible and necessary. Anselm works comprehensively. He experiences the doctrine in its entirety. Abelard is clever while Anselm is gifted with genius. With Anselm human reason create or produces a new reason from the doctrine. Abelard is content to show that the individual doctrine is reasonable. In him there lived the old conviction of the apologists that Christianity is the climax of all philosophy.[80]

[78] Fisher; 221.
[79] Newman; 478.
[80] Neve; 191.

Session 5: **Kings, Emperors, and Popes**

Text Reading: **Romans 13:1 - 7**

"Everywhere there was lawlessness, war,
and a struggle for power."
(H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*)

When Pope Leo III placed the imperial crown on Charlemagne's head that Christmas Day in AD 800, both men had a concept in their own mind as to what the 'Holy Roman Empire' ought to be. The predominantly Germanic empire north of the Alps was not called the Holy Roman Empire at that time, but the idea was present in the imperial dreams of Charlemagne and Leo. There were points of contact, to be sure, between the vision of the two men; but their points of departure were miles apart. Charlemagne was devoted to the Church, and intended to exercise the fullest extent of the civil administration for the promotion of Christian missions and Christian law throughout his dominions (which he also planned on expanding). But the Frankish king saw himself in the style of the ancient Roman emperors, who also held the title and office of *Pontifex Maximus* – the head of the Roman religion. The emperor in Constantinople had been since the days of Constantine I the effective head of the Eastern Church – it was Constantine who convened the first ecumenical council at Niceæ in 325. Charlemagne naturally imitated this heritage, and was encouraged in doing so by such advisors as Alcuin. In short, he saw himself as a *pontifical king*.

While Charlemagne fully intended to help the Church in any way that he could, he had no intention of yielding sovereignty to the pope in any measure. "Charlemagne was eager to gain all the power and prestige that the pope could confer; but he had not the remotest idea of renouncing a particle of his own sovereignty over lands or persons."[81] When the emperor was a powerful and dominant individual such as Charlemagne (and there were no others like him)

[81] Newman; 496.

and the pope a weak and embattled bishop like Leo III (and there were many like him), the balance of power between the imperial and the pontifical thrones was decidedly in favor of the secular sword. But this was of necessity on the part of the Roman Bishop, not of design or desire. Since Pope Gelasius (*d.* AD 496) the papal view was diametrically opposed to that of Charlemagne: the Bishop of Rome was the supreme head of both Church and State by virtue of his being not only the vicar of *St. Peter*, but also the vicar of *Christ* upon the earth. While the king or emperor considered himself in the old Roman mould as a 'pontifical king,' the Roman Bishop never budged on his own self-conception as a 'royal priest.' Here, then, were the two foci of power in post-Roman Europe: the King/Emperor on the one side, and the Pope on the other. "Henceforth the mediæval history of Europe is chiefly a history of the papacy and the empire. They were regarded as the two arms of God in governing the church and the world."[82] The analogy is idealistic, for in reality the two arms fought one another almost continuously for dominance. "It was easy enough to distinguish the two in theory by confining the pope to spiritual, and the emperor to temporal affairs. But on the theocratic theory of the union of church and state the two will and must come into frequent conflict."[83] This they did often, and often violently. The emperor, of course, held the physical advantage for he could field an army; the pope, however, was far from powerless for all but the most apostate ruler had to acknowledge that the welfare of his eternal soul depended on the keys which 'St. Peter' held in his hands. A Cold War developed (that occasionally became hot) between Rome and the various imperial and royal cities of Western Europe, a war often fought by proxy and one in which the balance of power shifted now to the emperor, now to the pope.

Charlemagne left the scene with the secular arm clearly dominant, so much so that even several generations of inept and feuding successors were not

[82] Schaff, Philip; *History of the Christian Church; Volume IV*; 256.
[83] *Ibid.*; 253.

sufficient to divest the Empire of predominance over the Pope. But this fact was also, in part, due to the incredible corruption and degradation of the papacy through the 9th and 10th Centuries. "The state of Rome in the tenth century is almost indescribable," writes H. G. Wells, a man rarely at a loss for words.[84]

The immediate effect upon Rome of Charlemagne's death, and his successors preoccupation with undermining one another's power, was to remove all effective protection from Rome. This once again exposed Rome and the Papal States to invasion by the Islamic Saracens and re-conquest by Byzantium. Yet it was still conceivable that an able pope could have held things together and advanced the welfare and influence of the papacy, too. Rome did have a short run of decent popes – or at least somewhat effective popes – in Nicholas I (858-67) and Hadrian II (867-72), but then the situation deteriorated to the point that Wells' rare incredulous and unusual lack of words is in itself quite accurate and descriptive. "Never was the papacy more degraded than from 880 – 1000."[85] At one point the Roman Curia was run successively by two woman, a mother and her daughter, and at least one pope, John XI, was the illegitimate son of the mother and a former pope. The following is an example descriptive of the entire period,

> The papacy lost almost all its power and prestige and came to be a bone of contention among rival factions. Pope Formosus (891-898) having been treated with the utmost indignity by one party and having been enabled afterward to wreak bloody vengeance upon his enemies, was probably poisoned. He was succeeded (after fifteen days, during which Boniface VI began and ended his pontifical reign) by his mortal enemy, Stephen VI, who had his body exhumed, tried, condemned, deposed, stripped of pontifical robes, cut to pieces, and thrown into the river.[86]

Salvation of the papacy would come, once again, from the north. The Carolingian dynasty had irreparably dissolved into the Western and Eastern

[84] Wells; 551.
[85] Newman; 499.
[86] *Idem*.

Frankish Kingdoms, the forerunners of modern France and Germany respectively. In Germany the Franks had lost hold of power and the reins fell to the Saxons, an incredible irony in itself considering the decades of violence spent by Charlemagne before he finally subdued that northernmost Germanic tribe. But the notion of an empire once again took root under the Saxon ruler Otto (Otho) I, known to posterity as Otto the Great (*Otto der Grosse*). It is with Otto I that historians usually date the beginning of the 'Holy Roman Empire,' though all recognize that what this mighty German king attempted to do was but a reprise of that which Charlemagne had accomplished almost two hundred years earlier.

Otto had himself anointed as emperor by the disreputable Pope John XII, a man who quite possibly qualifies as the absolute nadir of papal character. But Otto, like his predecessor Charlemagne, had no intention of yielding power, influence, or sovereignty to Rome; rather he intended on cleaning it up. Pope John XII continued his profligate ways and even joined in a plot against Otto. When the emperor heard about John's complicity, he returned to Rome and convened a council in which John was deposed and Leo VIII was 'elected' – essentially placed on the papal throne by Otto. John XII was not done, however, and after Otto returned to Germany the former pope stirred up the citizens of Rome (always an intangible and potent force in papal politics) to have Leo deposed and John restored. The latter died suddenly shortly afterward, and the citizens of Rome elevated their own candidate to the papacy as Benedict V. Otto returned to Rome, secured Benedict's capture and exile, and restored Leo VIII as Pope. In spite of these tawdry events, it does appear that Otto had sincere intentions of raising the dignity of the papacy once again to a position of respect in Europe, and his support of Catholic Christianity was dependable and strong. "With his assumption of the imperial dignity, Otto I did not so much overcome

Rome as restore the ancient tussle of Pope and Emperor for ascendancy to something like decency and dignity again."[87]

The imperial reformation of the Roman Church reached a high-water mark under Henry III, the second of the Salian Dynasty of emperors, who reigned from 1046-1056. Henry III involved himself even more heavily in papal politics than did his predecessors, personally deposing three popes and hand-picking a powerful German aristocrat, Bruno of Egisheim-Dagsburg, to become Pope Leo IX. This was a fortuitous choice for the Roman Papacy, as Leo IX turned out to be a good and noble pope, often considered by historians to be the most significant German pope in the history of the Roman Church. He was canonized in 1086 as Pope Saint Leo IX.

The reforms that Leo IX began in the Roman Church were both moral and administrative. He battled earnestly against **simony** – the selling of ecclesiastical offices – and for priestly celibacy and faithfulness. He also began to bring learned monks into the papal curia – the papal court – as law experts, who in turn began to codify and expand canon law and to assist the Pope in bringing this law code to bear against offenses both in the church and in society. The irony of Leo's reforms – for he did exactly what Henry III had hoped he would do – is that the Papacy became more powerful as it became more efficient and more respectable. Schaff writes, "as the papacy rose from its degradation, it overawed the empire."[88] The balance of power was shifting, again.

Leo IX apparently recognized talent, for the moral quality and administrative efficiency of the papal curia undoubtedly improved during his pontificate. One of his appointments as cardinal, and effectively Secretary of State for the Vatican, was a zealous monk named Hildebrand, who progressively increased the papacy's influence in foreign courts until 1073 when, by popular

[87] Wells; 553.
[88] Schaff; 257.

acclamation, he was elevated to the papal throne as Pope Gregory VII.[89] In Gregory the papacy had its most effective advocate since his namesake, Gregory the Great. "He was unquestionably the greatest ecclesiastical statesman of the Middle Ages."[90] Gregory was as absolutist in his views of papal supremacy as Charlemagne had been with regard to imperial prerogatives; but in Gregory VII the kings and emperors of Europe had a worthy and formidable opponent. At one point he would have the Holy Roman Emperor shivering the cold snow outside the papal castle in Canossa, begging forgiveness from the Pope. Later, however, he would be exiled from his throne by that same emperor. The Cold War grew hot with Gregory VII as pope.

Pope Gregory VII versus Emperor Henry IV:

Gregory VI, founder of what is known as the Hildebrandine party within the Roman Church, set himself foursquare against secular supremacy over the ecclesiastical rulers, especially that of the emperor over the pope. Drawing from his predecessor Gregory I, he issued edicts and judgments that consistently maintained his own authority as subject to no human court and no human being. He was the Vicar of Christ on earth, and since Christ is the King of kings, His vicar reigns supreme over all the kings of the earth. This authority was delegated throughout the fledgling nations of Western Europe via *legates* – men whose direct appointment by Gregory established their authority over all the kings, and even the bishops, of the territories to which they were sent.

> He identified papal supremacy in the most absolute way with the will of God an allowed nothing to stand in the way of the realization of his ideal of universal papal dominion in spiritual and secular things. With a shrewdness rarely equaled and a boldness of conception and action never surpassed, he set to work to utilize the current reforming spirit for the building up of ecclesiastical authority…More definitely stated, the policy of the Hildebrandine party was: (1) To free the papacy and the church in general from lay interference. (2) To reduce

[89] Canonized by Pope Benedict XIII in 1728 as Pope Saint Gregory VII.
[90] Newman; 503.

> all metropolitans, bishops, abbots, and clergy to absolute subjection to the papacy. (3) To reduce civil rulers to the necessity of acting in the papal interests.[91]

The first major bone of contention between pope and emperor was over the issue of ***investiture.*** This pertains to the official establishment of higher ranking church officers – bishops and abbots, primarily – in their positions. Investiture was not the same as the sacrament of ordination, which was from the beginning only dispensed by other officers of the Church. Rather, investiture had to do with the *insignia of office*, that which distinguished the higher clergy from the lower, and set apart the holders of bishoprics and abbeys from the laity. It was a product of the ***feudal system*** by which Europe society slowly came to be informally – and later formally – governed. It was a matter of sovereignty, as were most of the conflicts between the popes and the kings and emperors of Europe. To whom, ultimately, was a bishop or an abbot responsible? To whom was his paramount loyalty due?

The feudal system establishes social rank on the basis of landholding, and coordinates landholding with liege lordship. The king or emperor, by virtue either of his military conquests or his having been elected to the highest position by his noble peers, becomes the primary liege lord from whom all lesser nobles receive the title of their property in *fealty* – pledged faithfulness. Bishops and abbots were, like barons, earls, and dukes, members of the European nobility and possessed vast land holdings corresponding to their ecclesiastical courts. Indeed, many were members of the same family as the emperor or king, being younger brothers prevented by *primogeniture* from inheriting the title and thus being established in a powerful church office. Others, like Geoffrey (fitzRoy) Plantagenet, the Archbishop of York in the 12th Century, were the illegitimate sons of kings (Geoffrey was the bastard son of King Henry II of England), for whom their royal fathers nonetheless provided a comfortable and influential life.

[91] Newman; 503.

> As members of the feudal state, having territorial possessions corresponding with those of the larger subordinate nobles, bishops and abbots enjoyed the same privileges and immunities as the secular nobles, participated like these in the general legislation and administration, and were naturally expected to share the burdens of common defense and administration.[92]

All of this meant that the *filial* and *familial* loyalty for most of the highest ecclesiastical officers in medieval Europe was often strongest to the secular ruler rather than to the Roman Pope. To their liege lord these men pledged their loyalty, and frequently provided knights and men-at-arms for the king's wars. It is somewhat disconcerting to read of a battle charge during the Third Crusade being led by the Bishop of Salisbury, but at the time it was commonplace.[93]

In short, the very fabric of medieval society was woven with the threads of feudal hierarchy and the clearly recognizable lines of fealty between vassal and liege lord. This is not to say that every vassal was, in fact, loyal to his liege lord; but that is the way the system was supposed to work, and everyone knew it. With the system of *investiture*, the kings and emperors were not presuming to convey spiritual grace upon a consecrated bishop or abbot, they were merely claiming their right as liege lord with respect to the church officer's temporal lands and dignity. To be sure, this procedure did tie the political and financial fortune of the bishop or abbot very tightly to the fortunes of his liege lord and, to be sure, this is exactly what the king or emperor intended. But no one complained when Charlemagne did it (of course, no one complained when Charlemagne did anything), and no one complained when Otto the Great did it. Holy Roman Emperors down to Henry III used the system of investiture to consolidate their power base by

Medieval King investing a Bishop with his insignia

[92] Newman; 510.
[93] Hubert Walter (1160-1205), as Bishop of Salisbury, fought with Richard the Lionheart in Palestine during the Third Crusade. He was later elevated to Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest office in the English Church.

including the high officials of the Church as not only their vassals, but their trusted and useful lieutenants. And while the Church benefited from the protection of these lords, and from the reforming zeal which many of them possessed as 'pontifical kings,' the Church allowed the kings to continue in the same vein. But things began to change during Henry IV's imperial reign, and largely due the pope he was up against: Gregory VII.

> The efforts of Conrad II, and especially Henry III, to improve standards in the Church, in Rome and elsewhere – their conscientious discharge of their pontifical duties – did a great deal to create a reformed body of clergy which promptly denied Henry IV the right to exercise such duties.[94]

Thus the first titanic struggle between the two governing powers of the Middle Ages was joined between Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. Gregory's view of papal supremacy would not allow him to accept the system of investiture in any form whatsoever; all such interferences with officials of the Church was, to Gregory, nothing short of heresy. He issued an edict threatening excommunication on any bishop or abbot who accepted investiture from the secular ruler, and the same – along with interdict against the chief cities – against any king or emperor who so dared to encroach upon his pontifical sovereignty.

> He maintained that every invasion of the prerogative of the Roman Church is heresy and should be dealt with as such; that all law, even the law of God himself, may be set aside if this should be deemed by the church necessary for the accomplishment of its purposes…that the present interests of the church, the church itself being the judge, represent God's will and must be secured even if the violation of God's will otherwise expressed be involved.[95]

Emperor Henry IV was battling a truly hard-nose pope the likes of which had never been experienced during the first Christian millennium. Henry himself was elevated to King of the Germans when his father, Henry III died in

[94] Johnson; *A History of Christianity*; 194.
[95] Newman; 504.

1056; the new king was only six years old at the time. He was later elected Holy Roman Empire and, when he attained his majority, proved himself to be an able and vigorous successor in the imperial line stretching back to Otto I. When Gregory's thunderbolt came down from Rome, Henry was busy elsewhere in his realms putting down rebellions and expanding his territory. Gregory convened several synods in which he expanded his condemnation of investiture and demanded that all bishops and abbots swear allegiance to no one but the pope. Henry convened his own synods and countermanded all of Gregory's anathemas.

The issue came to a head on Christmas night in 1075. Gregory was kidnapped by a Roman nobleman and held prisoner for several days. He was freed by a near riot of the Roman populace and, upon regaining his liberty, promptly accused Henry IV of instigating the offense. He proceeded to excommunicate a number of German officials close to Henry – somewhat like lighting striking one's golfing buddies. Henry, in turn, convened another German synod and 'deposed' Gregory. Henry was hoping for tangible support from the Lombard nobility, none of whom were fond of the pope (any pope, for that matter), but Gregory enjoyed the significant and always crucial support of the Roman populace. Finally the thunderbolt came, and Gregory excommunicated Henry, at the same time issuing plenary indulgences for anyone who assassinated the emperor.

This would seem too much for any man who had taken upon himself the mantle of Charlemagne, and Henry IV proceeded to mount an invasion into Italy ostensibly to 'set things in order,' as other emperors had done and would do in the future. For all his spiritual bluff and bluster, the pope had no real temporal power at this time (that would come later) and could easily be physically removed from an emperor's path. The problem with this line of action, however, is that the general population of Europe – including the emperor's own subjects and vassals – considered the Pope to be the Vicar of Christ upon the earth and

the holder of the keys to heaven. This perception was often worth twelve legions of papal armies. Perhaps this was the reason that Henry, having crossed the Alps in what appeared to be martial array and intent, rather appeared before Gregory's castle door in Canossa begging mercy. For three days, in the heart of winter, Henry pleaded from outside the castle (according to popular accounts barefoot and insufficiently clothed or fed) until finally the pope relented and rescinded the writ of excommunication. "The humiliation of Henry at Canossa became one of the most noted events in the history of the struggle of Church and State for supremacy."[96]

What really happened between Henry IV and Gregory VII is difficult to discern from the history books. The official Catholic history relates the event as a complete triumph for the pope and a complete defeat for the emperor.

> Henry's position was now precarious. At first he was encouraged by his creatures to resist, but his friends, including his abettors among the episcopate, began to abandon him, and the Saxons revolted once more, demanding a new king. At a meeting of the German lords, spiritual and temporal, held at Tibur in October, 1076, the election of a new emperor was canvassed. On learning through the papal legate of Gregory's desire that the crown should be reserved for Henry if possible, the assembly contented itself with calling upon the emperor to abstain for the time being from all administration of public affairs and avoid the company of those who had been excommunicated, but declared his crown forfeited if he were not reconciled with the pope within a year… Abandoned by his own partisans and fearing for his throne, Henry fled secretly with his wife and child and a single servant to Gregory to tender his submission. He crossed the Alps in the depth of one of the severest winters on record. On reaching Italy, the Italians flocked around him promising aid and assistance in his quarrel with the pope, but Henry spurned their offers. Gregory was already on his way to Augsburg, and, fearing treachery, retired to the castle of Canossa. Thither Henry followed him, but the pontiff, mindful of his former faithlessness, treated him with extreme severity. Stripped of his royal robes, and clad as a penitent, Henry had to come barefooted mid ice and snow, and crave for admission to the presence of the pope. All day he remained at the door of the citadel, fasting and exposed to the inclemency of the wintry weather, but was

[96] Newman; 505.

> refused admission. A second and a third day he thus humiliated and disciplined himself, and finally on 28 January, 1077, he was received by the pontiff and absolved from censure, but only on condition that he would appear at the proposed council and submit himself to its decision.[97]

But secular histories, and Henry's subsequent behavior, argue for a very different motive on the part of the emperor. Shortly after returning to Germany with is pardon, Henry mounted a true invasion of Italy, captured Rome, and exiled Gregory from his throne. Henry was then chased from Rome by the Norman duke, Robert Guiscard, and Gregory was liberated. But his popularity had waned, and the excesses of his Norman rescuers offended the Roman people. He was forced again into self-imposed exile, first to Monte Cassino and later to the castle of Salerno. There he died in 1085, apparently uttering at the last, "I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile." Maybe he said that, maybe he did not.

Henry IV had his own troubles even after Gregory died. The higher orders of the clergy were emboldened and empowered by Gregory, and did not readily or totally abandon the former pope's political conquests. Henry himself was forced into exile in 1105, regained his liberty, defeated his son in battle, but died after a short illness in 1106. The Cold War had turned into a Holy War, and claimed its first two titans. The score was even: Empire 1; Rome 1.

King Henry II versus Thomas Becket:

The conflict between Gregory VII and Henry IV was a mere tempest in a teapot compared to one that came almost a century later. This time neither of the protagonists was pope, though one of them certainly had aspiration in that direction. The battle was joined between King Henry II of England, himself universally recognized as a force of nature, and his former Lord Chancellor, now Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Beckett. Beckett owed almost his entire rise

[97] New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia; http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06791c.htm

to power and prestige to his former friend, the English king. Without doubt he owes his subsequent sainthood, and the position of his shrine as one of the most sacred and visited in all of Roman Catholicism, to the rash words of that same former friend. In the end, Beckett was murdered and Henry was forced to perform a degrading penance at the former archbishop's tomb, lest he lose his kingdom over the demise of this new-made martyr.

Thomas Beckett was of notoriously low birth, his father being either a merchant or a minor knight. Thomas' path from obscurity started with him entering the Church as a clerk, and continued due to his natural brilliance and unbridled ambition. He acquitted a clerical position in the household of Theobald of Bec, who was at that time the Archbishop of Canterbury. In that capacity Beckett came into contact with England's dashing young king, Henry Plantagenet, and the two became fast friends in spite of Beckett's sixteen year advance on Henry in age. Henry made Thomas his Lord Chancellor, and in that role Thomas proved himself a thorough advocate for his king. Thinking all of his struggles with the Church would be solved by one more promotion, Henry elevated Beckett to Canterbury upon Theobald's death in 1162. That was Henry's biggest mistake.

Thomas Beckett all of a sudden became devout, and devoutly loyal to Rome. The issue of conflagration this time was not *investiture* but rather clerical immunity. Henry II was attempting to codify England's laws and to bring legal fairness and stability to his realm. Part of this effort was aimed at bringing clerical crimes under secular jurisdiction. For years monks and priests were able to commit the most heinous crimes and, being subject only to ecclesiastical courts, suffer only minor punishments (the Church did not have capital punishment within its penal code, so capital crimes were committed by immoral priests with relative impunity). This infuriated the citizenry of the land and, in turn, their king who was, by most accounts, a decent chap, though a bit hot-headed at times. Thomas Beckett not only refused to yield clerical protection

from secular courts, he refused even so much as to *appear* to compromise. He held a much stauncher position than any of his bishops and more so even than the pope, who counseled him to negotiate with Henry. Beckett refused, and was forced into exile in France (where he appealed to the French king, Henry's arch enemy, further antagonizing the English king).

A makeshift peace was cobbled together by the pope and several English bishops, and Beckett returned to Canterbury. He immediately resumed his intransigent behavior. It must be noted that he was not well liked by anyone – not by the English bishops, not by the French king, not by the Roman Pope, and certainly not, any longer, by the English king. King Henry issued a royal decree, the *Constitutions of Clarendon*, which were conciliatory and of a compromising nature. The constitutions were supported by the pope and the English clergy; but not, alas, by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Later, upon hearing that Henry's son was crowned heir-apparent by the Archbishop of York and the Bishops of London and Salisbury – at King Henry's request – Beckett hurled anathemas and excommunications left and right, including these three men – the second, third, and fourth ranking prelates in the English Church. It was in the midst of Beckett's fuming that King Henry was alleged to have said in a rage, "What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and brought up in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born cleric?" or something of the sort.

The Murder of Thomas Beckett

It is most likely that Henry was venting, for he was far too politically savvy to actually *want* Beckett murdered. Nonetheless, four of his knights - Reginald fitzUrse, Hugh de Morville, William de Tracy, and Richard le Breton – left the and rode post-haste to Canterbury, where they confronted the Archbishop. Again, accounts vary as to what happened next (though there is no disagreement

as to the outcome of the event). It seems as though the knights initially got cold feet, and that Thomas had ample opportunity to escape. By several accounts the Archbishop goaded the knights, even chastised them for being timid, and challenged them to show their manhood and kill him. They did.

Henry's world erupted in conflict; Thomas Beckett was declared a martyr for Christ and was almost instantaneously canonized, his tomb becoming a shrine and a frequent destination for Catholic pilgrims. Henry followed Henry IV in public repentance and self-humiliation before Beckett's sepulcher and, after a long while, the tempest died down. Tremendous damage had been done to Henry's prestige and to the foundations of his royal authority. Conversely, even the clergy who had previously either despised or disrespected Beckett saw and took great advantage now that he was dead. His death played into the Church's hands relative to the balance of power with the State. However, the pope at that time, Alexander III, did not seek further punishment of Henry beyond the king's public penance (and the pledge of monetary compensation, along with a promise to 'take up the cross' at a later date), realizing that so powerful a monarch was also a useful ally in the other balance of power struggles the Church faced in Western Europe.

The medieval church had become a State within the State, with differing loyalties and separate legal administration from the secular State. In its conflicts with the more physically powerful king or emperor, the pope had often shown himself capable of holding his own and, at times, even advancing his own cause. But this situation could only last while the relative moral quality of the clergy remained acceptably high in the eyes of the people. The reforms set in place during the imperial reign of Otto I needed to remain in place, if the political power thus derived by the bishops of Rome were to also remain. Subsequent popes (and clergy) eventually abandoned the moral high ground and, consequently, lost the political advantage they had gained.

Session 6: Monks & Doctors – A Third Front

Text Reading:

"First, we must pray; secondly, we must live holily;
thirdly, we must strive toward the reflection of the truth…
where we shall see the God of gods in Zion."
(Bonaventura, *The Mind's Road to God*)

During the Cold War, as Western civilization lined up behind the United States of America, standing against the Communist nations arrayed behind the Soviet Union, not all of the nations of the world wished to be in one camp or the other. In 1961 a 'third front' was opened on the political scene: the Non-Aligned Movement, led by India's powerful Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt's strongman Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Yugoslavia's communist maverick Marshall Tito. Most of the nations that were members of this organization during the Cold War were, in fact, 'aligned' with one of the two superpowers. For instance, Cuba's Fidel Castro held the organization's premiership from 1979-1983, though no one was fooled into thinking that Cuba was anything less than a proxy state for the U. S. S. R. Other country's, like India, truly kept themselves in a middle path between the political and military designs of the United States and the Soviet Union, to the aggravation of each superpower in turn.

A similar development occurred within Christendom of the Middle Ages, especially from the 11th through the 13th centuries. While supreme power coalesced about two foci – the Roman Papacy and the imperial & royal courts of the larger nations of Europe – there arose a third front analogous to the Non-Aligned Nations of the 20th Century. These became both religious and economic powers whose political and spiritual activities remained at times nominally, and at times truly, independent of either Pope or Emperor or King. These were the monasteries and universities of Western Europe; the monks and the doctors, who gathered to themselves knowledge, money, and power. By the 13th Century there were monastic communities in Italy, France, Germany, and England strong

enough to withstand all political pressure whether it came from Rome, Aachen, Paris, or Westminster. Similarly, although a little later in time, the theological school of the University of Paris – the *Sorbonne* – became the arbiter of theological, academic, and even political disputes from across the continent. Modern students are likely to associate monasticism with the Middle Ages, but few realize the rapid growth in academic skill and power that was accumulated by the universities of the same period. Together (though rarely in agreement) these two institutions presented further complications in the otherwise simple formula of Church versus State, and drove the dream of a united theocratic empire further into oblivion.

Monasticism, of course, had been around for many centuries by the time of Charlemagne and beyond. We are first introduced to the concept in a proactive way by Athanasius' glowing biography of the hermit Anthony, way back in the 3rd Century. This work popularized and to a large extent romanticized the monastic life, and the instances of people shunning the world and living out their days in solitary or communal society increased steadily over the next few centuries. By the 6th Century monasticism was an integral part of Christianity – both Eastern Greek and Western Latin branches – but as yet it had not become an institution, *per se*, within the ecclesiastical structure of the Church.

Benedict (*c.*480 – *c.*543)

It was at this time that someone came along to systematize and regulate the monastic life and, in so doing, set it on the path to becoming the powerful religious institution it would be in the later medieval era. This someone was **Benedict of Nursia**, for whom the Benedictines are named and who is widely considered the Patriarch of Western Monasticism. We know nothing of Benedict's origins, but much of his life's work. He founded numerous monastic houses in

Italy, the most famous of which is Monte Cassino in the mountains of Southern Italy. His greatest contribution to the monastic life, however, was his *Regula Monachroum*, or "Rules of Monasticism." This document was intended to regulate and govern the lives of novices, monks, and abbots in the growing number of Benedictine monastic communities, but it eventually became known simply as "The Rule of St. Benedict" and was used or adapted by almost every monastic order in Europe.

The Rule charted a middle course between uncontrolled zeal and rigid formalism within the monastic community. It shunned both the too harsh and the too lenient paths of solitary and communal living, and emphasized the value of both prayer and manual labor. "It secured strict discipline and order, but breathed a mild and even indulgent spirit, while at the same time it took account of the requirements of human nature and of the time; withal, it was simple, plastic, and eminently practical."[98] Based perhaps on the Scriptural proverb, *"Where there are an abundance of words, transgression is sure to follow,"* Benedict favored near total silence in the monastery. Another fundamental principle of the Benedictines, which became at least the professed characteristic of all monastic orders, was the vow of poverty. The individual monk possessed no wealth whatsoever; all was held communally by the monastery, under the control of the abbot. Benedict's book ran to seventy-three chapters, though none were very long. An example of his irenic and reasonable spirit can be seen in this excerpt from Chapter 2, on the qualifications of the abbot.

> The abbot who is worthy to rule over a monastery ought always to bear in mind by what name he is called and to justify by his life his title of superior. For he represents Christ in the monastery, receiving his name from the saving of the apostle: "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" [Rom. 8:15] Therefore the abbot should not teach or command anything contrary to the precepts of the Lord, but his commands and his teaching should be in accord with divine justice. He should always bear in mind that both his teaching

[98] Kurtz; *History of the Christian Church*; 331.

> and the obedience of his disciples will be inquired into the dread Day of Judgment. *For the abbot should know that the shepherd will have to bear the blame if the Master finds anything wrong with the flock.* Only in case the shepherd has displayed all diligence and care in correcting the fault of a restive and disobedient flock will he be freed from blame at the judgment of God. . . . Then shall be punishment fall upon the flock who scorned his care and it shall be the punishment of death. The abbot ought to follow two methods in governing his disciples: teaching the Commandments of the Lord to the apt disciples by his words, and to the obdurate and the simple by his deeds. And when he teaches his disciples that certain things are wrong, he should demonstrate it in his own life by not doing those things. . . . Let there be no distinction of persons in the monastery. *Let the abbot not love one more than another, unless it the one who excels in good works and in obedience.* The freeman is not to be preferred to the one who comes into the monastery out of servitude, unless there be some other good reason. . . . For whether slave or free, we are all one in Christ. . . . *Therefore, the abbot should have the same love toward all and should subject all to the same discipline according to their respective merits. . . . That is, he should suit his methods to the occasion, using either threats or compliments, showing himself either a hard master or a loving father, according to the needs of the case.* Thus he should reprove partially the obdurate and the disobedient, the meek, and the gentle he should exhort to grow in grace. We advise also that he rebuke and punish those who neglect and scorn his teaching. . .[99]

Such was Benedict's influence in his day that in the decades and centuries following – up until the 10th or 11th centuries – the vast majority of those who abjured the worldly life and 'took the cowl' as a monk considered themselves to be 'Benedictines.' Paul Johnson comments in his *A History of Christianity* that "so successful was the Benedictine rule that all other forms of monasticism were absorbed into it; by 1050 it was the norm."[100] But that does not mean that by 1050 all monastic orders were healthy, or even followed the Rule in anything other than the most cursory manner. In fact, the quality of monastic life both in the individual and within the scattered communities, declined along with the general decline in society as barbarism reclaimed Western Europe. We have seen

[99] http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/benedict.html; italics added.
[100] Johnson, *A History of Christianity*; 234.

that Charlemagne was a great benefactor to the monastic movement, but after his death moral decline once again set in.

The renaissance of monastic life arose pretty much in accordance with the fundamental mindset that lies behind monasticism: abandonment of the world. One might consider this path of abandonment in two stages: the first is to devote oneself to the clerical life, to receive Holy Orders as a priest or deacon in the Catholic Church. But when the Church itself is corrupt seemingly beyond reclamation, the second step is to abandon her as well and to enter a monastery or convent. So corrupt was the Church, and so wicked and debased the world, in the early Middle Ages that many individuals bypassed the first step and went straight to the second. "The disordered state of Europe, and the prevailing misery, led multitudes to seek refuge in the monasteries from the ills of life."[101] From the vantage point of the 21st Century we might label this 'escapism' and indict the whole movement as unbiblical and counterproductive. Such judgments would, however, overlook the fact that for the most part the men who organized new monastic orders did so in order to realize true Christian community within a debased world. The rise of monasticism in the Middle Ages parallels the *moral* decline of the Church in the same period.

During the period between AD 1000 and 1300 monasticism experienced a tremendous revival, and the movement took on a life of its own in relation to both the Church and the State. Prosperous abbots would found numerous monasteries subordinate to one very powerful center, such as Clugny in France during this period. "By the middle of the twelfth century there were two thousand convents subject to Clugny."[102] Along with the Benedictines from so many centuries earlier, there were several new orders created during this time that also rose to great eminence, wealth, and influence. Chief among these were

[101] Newman; *A Manual of Church History*; 452.
[102] *Ibid.*; 455. Clugny is also frequently spelled as 'Cluny,' and the monks associated with this cloister were known as Cluniac monks.

the Augustinians (of which order Martin Luther was a monk), the Cistercians, and later the two most powerful of them all, the Dominicans and the Franciscans.

Initially these orders were sponsored by members of existing monastic societies who desired to see a 'return' to the simple regimen and purity of the Rule of Benedict. As the monastic life became more popular, and as world events made earthly life more tremulous and unstable, many wealthy members of European society either joined monasteries outright, or donated large benefices to various convents. Often the rich and powerful in society would seek to smooth their own passage through the afterlife by fronting the endowment money to begin a monastic community, and leaving large and wealthy estates to the monastery in their wills. As a result of this the territorial possessions and amassed wealth of the medieval monastery was, from our perspective, downright obscene. It was as if when the man fled from the world and entered the monastery, the world followed him there.

> The monasteries, owing to the great popularity of monasticism, acquired immense wealth, which invariably led to grievous corruptions, necessitating the periodic formation of new orders by those who wished to stem the tide of worldliness.[103]

But in order to establish a monastery, with all of the 'rights and privileges thereto appertaining,' it was necessary to receive papal approval. One can only imagine how the medieval popes, political animals as they were, viewed the sponsorship of monasteries. The supplicant came to the Holy Father seeking to create an enclave in which meditation and contemplation would be the norm of daily life, and from which Christian love and service would flow to the surrounding community. The pope saw political advantage over the emperor, and over the bishops who were often both appointed by and related to the royal person. "The popes favored monasticism by making the monasteries

[103] Newman; 453.

independent of the bishops, by using monks for responsible positions, by giving to monastic preachers the right to preach, hear confession, etc., without the permission of the bishops or parish clergy, and in many other ways."[104] Thus the monasteries became an instrument in the hands of the Roman Bishop for the aggrandizement and spread of papal power throughout Western Europe.

But the State had some means of tempting the convents over to their side as well. First of all, the territories owned by the monasteries were still held 'in fief' to the king or emperor, which carried with it a very strong political cord within feudal Europe. Secondly, it is a grand thing to be welcomed among the 'movers and shakers,' the rich and powerful, and it did not take long for the kings and emperors to realize that a well-placed abbot among their confederates was worth any number of bishops. Kings did this by 'gracing' abbots with their presence as they traveled through their dominions, thus beguiling the monastic rulers with the sumptuous living of upper class of the world. Indeed, many of the abbots at this time were themselves members of the nobility who had grown accustomed to lavish living during their minority and continued in it as heads of their respective monasteries. The ledger of the famous monastery of Mont St. Michel is consistent with the general trend within all of the larger monastic order, as it sets out line by line the incredible quantities of food and drink that were expended for the entertainment of visiting nobility.

> The bulk of the monastic income, totaling £9,000 a year, went on the splendor and hospitality of the main house – including £1,700 on food, £500 on clothing, £460 on repairs…the largest single item was wine: £2,200.[105]

But all was not excess and immorality in the cloisters. As with all noble causes there was excess, and as time passed these excesses became the norm and piety the aberration. But in the early years of any given monastic movement there could be found many sincere believers, devoted to the contemplative life, to

[104] Newman; 452.
[105] Johnson; 238.

study and meditation and, often, to sacrificial service to those outside the convent walls. The notion of monasticism itself is not hard to understand; one need merely imagine a world so wicked as to seem beyond recall. In just such a world God called Noah into the ark; and in a similar world individuals believed that they heard God calling them into the monastery. But while there, they were not idle. The monasteries of Europe became the libraries and printing presses of Western Civilization. "To these quiet literary monks we are indebted for the preservation and transmission of nearly all the learning, sacred and secular, of ancient times. If they had done nothing else, they would be entitled to the lasting gratitude of the church and the world."[106]

The character of the monastery at its beginning mirrored the character of its founder. Francis of Assisi was a mystic; Dominic a theologian. Henceforth the Franciscans tended to be mystics and the Dominicans theologians. Of course no one is 100% one or the other: the Franciscans filled many university chairs at Paris, and elements of mysticism may be found in so technical a Dominican as Thomas Aquinas. But the general patterns still remained as almost psychological reproductions of the founders. And among their descendants there were honorable and faithful men, though their ranks were undoubtedly thinned as the centuries passed.

One of the great examples of mystical monasticism in the era was the Cistercian monk **Bernard of Clairvaux**, who illustrates the devotion of a solitary existence coupled with active participation in the life of the Church and the State. Bernard was a leading member of the Cistercians, whose institution was specifically intended for the reformation of the aging and declining Benedictines. In 1098 a group of monks

Bernard (1090-1153)

[106] Schaff; *History of the Christian Church: Volume IV*; 364.

from the Benedictine monastery of Molesme departed and founded a new abbey in the nearby town of Cîteaux in the French province of Digon. The Latin name of that town, and its newly associated abbey, is Cistercium, from which the monastic order of the Cistercians is derived. Their code was still the Rule of St. Benedict, but their desire was to focus the cloister upon manual labor and self-sufficiency, as they deemed the accumulation of wealth to have been a morally corrupting influence on the Benedictines.

Bernard's personal character and talents benefited this young order after he requested admission at about twelve years of age, following the death of his mother. His psychological bent was definitely toward the mystic side of the spectrum, yet he was no antagonist of rational study. "Bernard was not a foe to learning and science, but his power was exerted in the direction of laying a curb upon reason and exalting piety as the door to knowledge."[107] In this regard Bernard was more a spiritual heir of Anselm than of Abelard. This is also true of his own moral character, which was highly acclaimed in his own day, and almost without exception since. The Cistercian appears in Dante's *Divine Comedy* as the author's last guide through Paradiso.[108]

Bernard's learning, piety, and eloquence conspired to keep him from a truly solitary life. As the founding abbot of the monastery in the *Claire Vallée* ('Clear Valley') – later transmuted into *Clairvaux* – Bernard was a high-ranking nobleman within the feudal society of France. As such he became a counselor to the French kings Louis VI and Louis VII. As the latter of these two was the first husband to Eleanor of Aquitaine (who, upon her divorce from Louis proceeded to marry the young challenger to the English throne, Henry fitzEmpress the Count of Anjou), one can imagine the tumultuous world in which Bernard lived, and from which he so earnestly desired to retire. Bernard remained in the center of the mix, attending councils of both Church and State, and was proclaimed a

[107] Fisher; 225.
[108] Alighieri, Dante; *The Divine Comedy*, Cantos XXXI – XXXIII.

'Doctor of the Church' by Pope Honorius II and was charged with heading the reforms of the French monasteries – including the much older abbey at Clugny – and with combating heresy within the Church. This latter duty brought him into conflict with Peter Abelard, who was eleven years Bernard's senior.

> The great antagonist of Abelard was Bernard of Clairvaux. The two men, as to mental peculiarities and character, are in the strongest contrast to one another. If we look for the secret of the overpowering eloquence of Bernard and of his unequalled influence as an ecclesiastical leader, as a promoter of the crusades, a guide and monitor of Popes, we shall find it in the depth and ardor of his piety…Pervaded with reverence and awe for divine things, Bernard was deeply aggrieved by Abelard's essays to explain them as if they were every-day matters. He complains that through Abelard's influence all minds were unsettled.[109]

The sequel to the story reinforces the 'overpowering eloquence' of Bernard, for Abelard was indeed condemned and forced into penurious exile. But Bernard did not limit his eloquence and invective to his peers or subordinates, and often chastised popes for behavior he considered to be detrimental to their supreme pastoral function. By the middle of the 12th Century the Roman Curia had essentially abandoned that function in favor of what was one of the most labyrinthine legal matrices in history.[110] Bernard, nearing the end of his own life in 1150, wrote a reproving letter to Pope Eugenius III, "Why do you sit from morning until evening listening to litigants? What fruit is there in these things? They can only create cobwebs."[111] Unfortunately the 'fruit' of which Bernard speaks was money – there was a great deal of money being made through the litigation brought before the Pope – and Bernard's pastoral challenge went completely unheeded.

[109] Fisher; 224-225.
[110] Paul Johnson likens the papal legal system to the case of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* from Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*.
[111] Quoted by Johnson; 206.

Many historians consider Bernard "the most powerful personality and the greatest religious genius of his time."[112] His legacy, beyond the testimony of Dante, includes the classic hymns attributed to his pen, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," and "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee." His role in stirring up the zeal and vigor for the Crusades is, to be sure, a detraction from his otherwise honorable life; but judged within the context of his time – a time we shall see in a later lesson was 'ripe' for crusading ardor – he comes out looking remarkably evangelical. "It is genuinely Pauline when Bernard absolutely denies the possibilities of merits, and asserts that the forgiveness of sins and the granting of eternal life is by grace alone. The only merit which a man may have is to hope in his Saviour and to have a humble readiness to receive God's grace. 'The righteousness of man consists in the pardon of God.'"[113] Bernard was canonized by Pope Alexander III in 1174; remarkably only twenty-one years after his death.

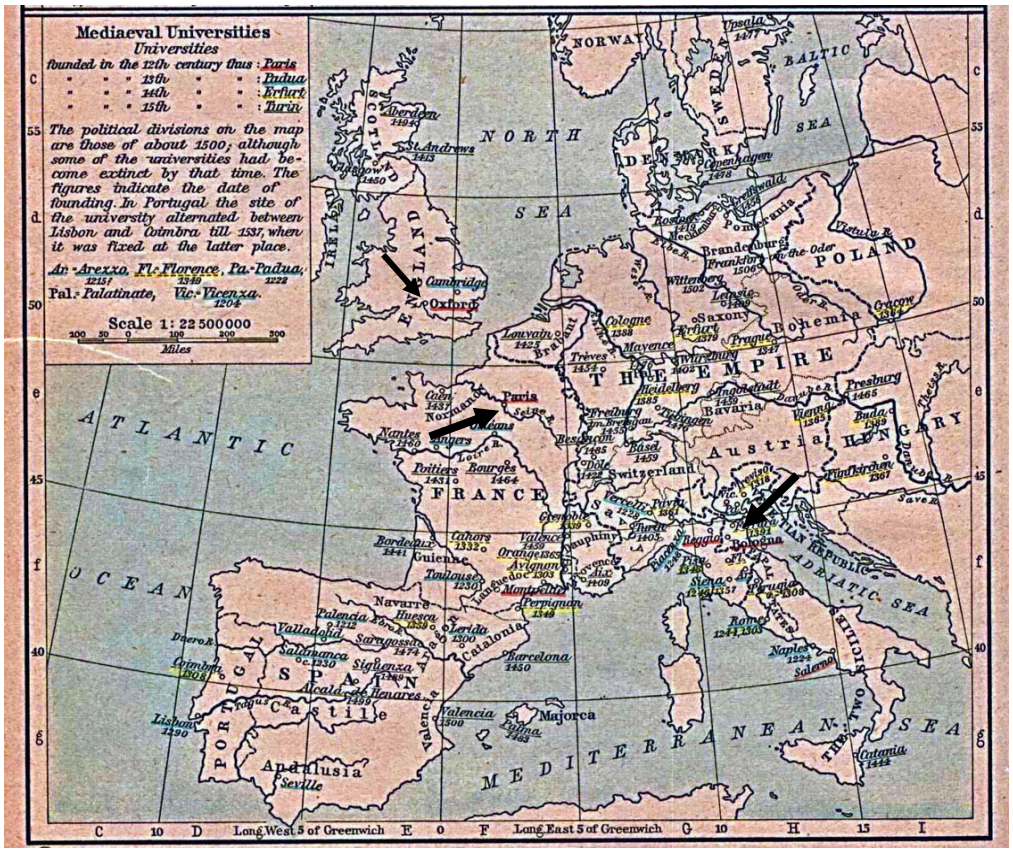
In the 10th through 12th centuries it was mainly the mystic who sought solace and solitude in the monasteries. The 'thinkers' were there, too, of course – Anselm and Abelard being the prime examples. But monasteries were not designed for theological study as much as for meditative contemplation. Even the work of manuscript transmission was often an act of rote copying by monks, rather than critical analysis of the texts that were being copied. Still, there was a resurgent intellectual movement in this era – a heritage from the Carolingian Renaissance – that needed an outlet for expression. This came in the form of the **university**.

There were two basic fields of study that were followed by medieval clergy who were personally inclined that way: the study of *theology* and the study of *canon law*. The former dates back to time immemorial; the latter to Charlemagne's court where the merging of civil and canon law first became a characteristic of 'Christendom.' Around the year 1100 a teacher named Irnerius

[112] Neve; 186.
[113] *Ibid.*; 187.

appeared in Bologna, Italy who quickly gained renown for his knowledge of Roman law. His reputation spread throughout Europe and many young men flocked to Bologna to 'study' law under Irnerius. One of these students was a German monk named Johannes Gratian, who later compiled the most exhaustive anthology of canon law yet written in Church history. Gratian's *Decretum* became the standard legal textbook in Roman Catholic universities until replaced with an updated volume in 1918 – almost eight hundred years!

This nucleus of legal scholars concentrated in Bologna eventually organized into the first university in Western Europe – the University of Bologna, which has been in continuous session ever since its founding in 1158.[114]



Other universities developed out of the Carolingian cathedral schools at Paris (1200)[115] and Oxford (1167). The four centuries from the time of Irnerius

[114] Some sources date the founding of Bologna to 1088; the more conservative date of 1158 is offered here.
[115] Again, an earlier date of 1170 can be defended from the historical records, but by 1200 the University of Paris was awarding degrees under that name.

witnessed a virtual explosion of university foundation and attendance, and the medieval universities rapidly became centers both of learning and rebellion (as they have always been). One school of theology – the *Sorbonne* of the University of Paris – eventually gained such a reputation for learned masters and doctors that its opinion carried greater weight among both civil and ecclesiastical leaders than the popes. "The Sorbonne…came to be the highest theological authority in the world, not excepting that of the popes themselves, with whom it was frequently in conflict."[116]

These centers of learning would factor massively in the years leading up to the Reformation of the 16th Century, with pre-reformers such as John Wyclif (Oxford) and Jan Hus (Prague) paving the way for the likes of Jacques Lefevre (Paris), Martin Luther (Wittenburg), and John Calvin (Paris, again). The universities would also become the tinder kegs for the Renaissance, which aided the Reformation to a great degree, but which also exalted human reason beyond measure, and ultimately brought about the atheistic Enlightenment.

These two strands of 'non-aligned' ecclesiastical institutions – the monastery and the university – followed separate paths in their formation and their development. For a time their existence was largely independent of one another, at least until the first half of the 13th Century. At that time two new 'preaching' orders were developed – the Dominicans and the Franciscans. But their story ought to be told in their century, and oriented to their two most illustrious members (other than, of course, their founders): **Thomas Aquinas** and **Bonaventura**. These two leading lights of the 13th Century were, ironically, teaching masters at the University of Paris at the same time, and waged a friendly war of intellectual competition to woe students away from one another.

[116] Newman; *A Manual of Church History*; 472.

Session 7: **Onward Christian Soldiers – The Crusades**

Text Reading: **II Corinthians 10:3-5**

"The idea that Europe was a Christian entity,
which had acquired certain inherent rights over the rest of the world
by virtue of its faith…
married perfectly with the need to find some outlet
for its addiction to violence and its surplus population."
(Paul Johnson)

It is almost universally agreed today that the era of the Crusades represents the darkest stain upon the reputation of the Christian religion. The holy wars launched from Western Europe into Palestine, ostensibly to 'deliver' the venerated Jerusalem from the infidel, are as condemned in our day as they were glorified in the 12th Century. However, it is not enough for the modern historian to say that the Crusaders were misguided; rather it is the challenge of scholarship to attempt to sift through the historical data and come to an understanding of just why and how so many could become *so* misguided. An event like the Crusades – or the Holocaust of Nazi Germany, or the Islamic jihad of our own day – requires the confluence of several strains of 'sanctified vice' in order to take place. In other words, such widespread approval of actions that are clearly in violation of basic tenets of morality and ethics can only happen when a series of contributing evils are themselves cloaked in righteous garb. In the case of the Crusades, these 'lesser' evils included chivalric violence, political papism, and the superstitious devotion to sacred places and things.

Contrary to popular belief, the beginnings of the crusading flowed not from Rome, but from the lands of the Norseman, the 'Vikings.' To be sure, Vikings were never noted for religious fanaticism, their religion being both militaristic and practical. Nonetheless the Norse people contributed an aspect of medieval Western European culture without which the massive movements of hundreds of thousands of cavalry and infantry could never have been gathered, much less moved across thousands of miles in pursuit of eternal glory. This

stream of vice – chivalric violence – flowed to the Crusading Era from the headwaters of the 9th Century in the Western Frankish Kingdom of Charles the Simple. The 9th Century was the time of the Vikings, and their marauding bands roamed from the Baltic Sea around the British Isles, to Iceland, Greenland, and North America, down through Russia to the Caspian and Black Seas, and around the Iberian Peninsula into the Mediterranean, where Viking raiders harassed Sicily, Sardinia, and Italy. Winter in the northern climes meant the advent each year of Norse ships and Viking depredations. In some instances, particularly in Britain and Russia, the raiders stayed and fought the native populations for dominion of the land. But generally their arrival was both temporary and devastating.

The Norse were governed very loosely in a confederacy of tribal leaders. There would be nothing resembling a Norse 'empire' until the reign of Canute the Great, King of England, Denmark, and Norway during the first quarter of the 11th Century. As early as the 9th Century, however, there were individual Norse leaders powerful enough to cause perennial difficulties for the 'Christian' dukes and kings of England and Western Europe. One such was Rollo the son of Ragnald, who was reputed to have been such a giant of a man that no horse was found capable of carrying him. He was apparently able to do on foot more violence than many men on horseback. Year after year Rollo's bands terrorized the region around the Frankish cities of Rouen and Paris, until finally the Western Frankish King, Charles the Simple, struck upon the idea of 'domesticating' Rollo by making him a vassal duke. Evidently Rollo was ready to settle down (in a Norse manner of speaking); he accepted Christianity and was baptized as 'Robert,' the first Duke of Normandy. The warlike race of the Normans was thus born, and Europe would never be the same afterward.

Rollo Ragnaldson (*c.* 846-931)

Charles the Simple was deposed by Robert I, and Rollo considered this act to dissolve his oath of fealty to the Frankish king. The Normans thus began (resumed) their warlike ways, expanding the duchy of Normandy to the east, west, and south. Future generations of Rollo's descendants would continue this metastasis of power throughout France, across the Channel (in 1066 Rollo's great-great-great-grandson, William, Duke of Normandy, would become the Conqueror of England), and as far away as Sicily and the Italian Peninsula. The Normans introduced that structure so often associated with the Middle Ages, the castle, which was less a home than a fortress and typified the warlike nature of this breed of Christianized Vikings.[117]

The presence of such a militaristic people, now 'sanctified' into the European establishment by virtue of being made dukes and knights of the feudal order, caused a great deal of trouble for the Hildebrandian popes and their plan of uniting all of western civilization under one, holy, imperial Church. This plan called for the uniting of all civil authority under one Holy Roman Emperor, who was himself subject to the head of the Holy Catholic Church, the Pope. Hildebrand, anointed as Pope Gregory VII, had finally brought some semblance of piety and order to the papacy, but the on-going struggles between the Emperor and his vassals, along with the burgeoning nationalism of France and England, kept this dream of a Holy Roman Empire well out of papal reach. Pragmatism enters at this point, and Gregory VII is handed an opportunity to channel the incipient militarism of the Norman race into 'holy war' – the crusade against the infidel.

> Throughout the eleventh century the Church tried to keep the peace movement alive, but the popes eventually surrendered to the temptation to divert what they regarded as the incorrigible bellicosity of western society into crusades against the infidel.[118]

[117] Later this line would blend with the dukes of Anjou, reputedly descended from the devil himself, to produce perhaps the most capable military family in history, the Plantagenet.
[118] Johnson; 242.

The opportunity arose from an unexpected source: the Emperor of the East, in Constantinople. Byzantium had been hard pressed on every side by invading Asiatic tribes in the north, and by the inexorable tide of Islamic Turks from the south and southeast. By the end of the 11th Century Constantinople was effectively hemmed in, and the imperial dominions of the Greek emperor extended very slightly beyond the walls of Constantine's great city. Finally, in 1093, Emperor Alexius sent fervent appeals to his western cousins – especially to the Pope in Rome – seeking assistance in his struggle against the 'infidel' Muslims. Although this was not the first time the concept of armed resistance against Islamic forces arose within the papal mind, the excuse of coming to the rescue of Catholicism's 'eastern brethren' was too advantageous to pass up.

Gregory VII often encouraged the lords and kings of western Europe to use their military might in the protection of pilgrims to the 'Holy Land, ' and for the recovery of the holy sites located there, particularly the revered Church of the Holy Sepulchre. His conflict with Emperor Henry IV over investiture, however, occupied the bulk of his latter years, and no effective order was brought to armed intervention in Palestine. Gregory's successor, Urban II, used the occasion of Emperor Alexius' plea to rouse the leaders of Western Europe to undertake the First Crusade. Urban was an eloquent orator; when he spoke of the depredations experienced by Christian pilgrims at the hands of the Islamic conquerors of Jerusalem, the crowds were moved both to tears and to immediate, emotional, and steadfast dedication to 'taking the cross' and marching against the infidel under the banner of Christ. Urban's sermon at the Council of Clermont in 1095 is considered to be the inauguration of two centuries of crusading efforts by Western Christendom.

Urban II (1042-99)

It may be that the popes truly believed that the religious wars they were fomenting represented the will of God; that the recovery of Jerusalem and the

various 'sacred' places located in its environs was what Jesus Christ would have His Church do for His honor and glory. Furthermore, it may also be true that many of the men – noble and base alike – took up the cross with sincere desire to please their Lord Jesus Christ, and to secure for themselves divine approbation and eternal beatitude. But the unfolding of events for the subsequent two hundred years – the political intrigues of crusading kings against one another, the myriad excommunications hurled far and wide by the popes, the rampant looting, pillaging, and killing meted out by the Crusaders against Jews - and even Christians of other ethnicity than the Western knights – all conspire to demand the verdict that the overall efforts were driven far more by the prospect of political and economic gain, than by any sincere, religious feeling. "From the start…the crusades were marked by depredations and violence which were as much racial as religious in origin."[119]

But before we survey the Crusades themselves, we must add that one last ingredient to the mix of Norman militarism and papal politics, an ingredient without which the brew could never have boiled over into actual military action against the Muslim occupiers of Jerusalem and the 'Holy Land.' The final component necessary for this volatile mixture of violence and religion to combust, was the pervasive superstition that had infiltrated Christianity over the previous centuries to the point that all conception of justification by grace through faith was all but forgotten in favor of a salvation attained by good works.

Successive popes, assisted by the monastic orders they themselves empowered, had successfully built an institutional Christianity wherein the ritual of the Mass and the authority of the occupant of St. Peter's throne carried immeasurable influence in the minds of the people, high-born and low-born alike. "Medieval Roman Catholicism was a religion of forms and ceremonies, and superstition abounded. The veneration of shrines and relics and the belief in

[119] Johnson; 245.

their capacity to work miracles and to confer spiritual benefits was almost universal."[120] By the end of the first Christian millennium, the Catholic Church had fully adopted the sacramentalism that would remain the *modus operandi* of salvation to the present day. To be sure, the theological foundations for the sacraments would continually be laid and shored up against dissent; but the practical truth that Christian salvation was mediated via the Roman Catholic priesthood through the instrumentality of the sacraments, was almost universally accepted within Christendom prior to the Crusades.

Further medieval developments of sacramentalism came with the invention of *purgatory*, and the emphasis placed by the later popes on the authority of the *keys of the kingdom* to consign or release souls therefrom. We have seen, and will see in greater measure, the impact of *indulgences* upon the mechanistic piety of medieval Christianity; the ability to 'pre-pay' penance for sins yet committed was viewed by many even in that day, to be a travesty of the doctrine of grace. Nonetheless, the papacy consumed a great deal of money; hence the sale of indulgences was here to stay. Pilgrimages were worth their weight of danger and travail in the gold of absolution. Shrines were established throughout Western Europe, wherein were located 'relics' – sacred remains of holy places, things, or people. But the crown jewel of all pilgrimages for medieval Christians was to walk the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, and to worship at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Even after the Middle East had fallen to the Islamic armies in the 7th Century, safe passage was generally assured by the caliphs and sultans for Christian pilgrims traveling to the 'Holy Land.' And for good reason: the Christians paid for the privilege to walk where Jesus walked, and to worship where He died and where He was laid in the tomb. It made good economic sense for the Muslim overlords to permit the steady stream of Christian pilgrims from Western Europe, along with the steady flow of gold that accompanied the

[120] Newman; 457.

wealthier of their number. With the approach of the end of the millennium, and the associated apocalyptic prophecies of the imminent end of the age, these pilgrimages only increased.

> The early Mohammedan rulers had guaranteed to Christians the right to visit the holy places without molestation. The failure of the year 1000 to bring the end of the age, almost universally expected by Christians, greatly stimulated pilgrimages.[121]

Shortly after the uneventful turn of the millennium, there was a dramatic shift in the ruling structure of Palestine. The Seljuk Turks – Persian Muslims - had gained the upper hand over the diminishing Arabian Muslims. The new rulers' attitude toward Christianity was far more hostile then the previous overlords, and they soon vented their animosity upon the pilgrims from Western Europe. "Extortionate tolls, robbery, imprisonment, and acts of sacrilege, greatly exasperated the pious pilgrims, and the story of these atrocities rapidly spread throughout Europe."[122]

The Seljuk Empire *c.* 1090

Thus for most Christians in Western Europe, the idea of a holy war for the deliverance of Jerusalem from the hands of the infidel, was amenable to their own understanding of the route to heaven. Salvation was an arduous path of good works, with the gaps being filled in through the mediatorial sacramental grace secured from the priest and, ultimately, the Pope. One great path for the reduction of many purgatorial years, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, was now effectively blocked by the Saracen. This was tantamount to placing an obstacle not merely on the Christian's way to the 'Holy Land,' but across the very path to heaven. The Abbot Guibert, chronicler of the First Crusade, wrote that "God had

[121] Newman; 457.
[122] *Ibid.*; 458.

invented the Crusades as a new way for the laity to atone for their sins, and to merit salvation."[123]

In reality this was no 'Christian' endeavor, though many of the deluded thousands and hundreds of thousands who participated and perished in the Crusades believed the Crusading battle cry, *Deus Volt!* – "God wills it!" to be the divine truth. Schaff's diagnosis of the Crusading spirit is true of the larger portion of medieval Christianity:

> The Crusaders sought the living among the dead. They mistook the visible for the invisible, confused the terrestrial and the celestial Jerusalem, and returned disillusioned.[124]

Sadly, many did not return. Over the course of two centuries there were seven major Crusades, one pitiful 'Children's Crusade,' and numerous minor Crusades targeted at 'heretics' within Europe itself. It was and remains a very dark chapter in the history of professing Christianity, an age of stark contrasts. "The religion of the Middle Ages combined self-denying asceticism with heartless cruelty to infidels, Jews, and heretics."[125]

The First Crusade:

Pope Urban II considered that he had very good reason to call for armed intervention by the knights and kings of Western Europe into the affairs of the Middle East. The papal attempts to expand its influence across all of Europe was having some of greatest setbacks right in its own backyard. For centuries the Saracens threatened the security of Italy; having conquered and occupied Sicily, the Muslim armies made perennial incursions of the Italian Peninsula itself. This pressure was relieved in the 1060s by the Norman conquest of Sicily under the minor nobleman, Robert Guiscard.[126] Guiscard expanded his gains into Italy, at the expense of the Saracens, and became the

[123] Schaff, Philip; *History of the Christian Church; Volume V*; 217.
[124] *Ibid.*; 220.
[125] *Ibid.*; 240.
[126] The 1060s were a good decade for the Normans, with the more famous Duke William conquering England in 1066.

founder of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, essentially the island of Sicily and the southern portion of the Italian Peninsula from Naples to the tip of the boot. The exchange of Saracen for Norma was not particularly felicitous for the popes, however, for of the two races the Saracens were probably the more agreeable. Byzantine historian (and Empress) Anna Comnena provides perhaps the fullest contemporary account of Robert Guiscard,

> This Robert was Norman by birth, of obscure origins, with an overbearing character and a thoroughly villainous mind; he was a brave fighter, very cunning in his assaults on the wealth and power of great men; in achieving his aims absolutely inexorable, diverting criticism by incontrovertible argument. He was a man of immense stature, surpassing even the biggest men; he had a ruddy complexion, fair hair, broad shoulders, eyes that all but shot out sparks of fire. In a well-built man one looks for breadth here and slimness there; in him all was admirably well-proportioned and elegant… Homer remarked of Achilles that when he shouted his hearers had the impression of a multitude in uproar, but Robert's bellow, so they say, put tens of thousands to flight.[127]

Thus, in addition to perhaps a modicum of genuine religious feeling, Urban had also a pressing need to redirect the belligerent spirit of the Normans from his own doorstep, hopefully channeling it into a stream more beneficial to the Roman See. Thus, when Emperor Alexius' plea for assistance came to hand, Urban II was ready to respond. The political advantages to the Roman Church – diverting the Norman energy eastward, and 'coming to the rescue' of the Eastern Empire – were an unparalleled windfall no previous pope had seen, and unlikely to be seen often by any subsequent pontiff. "Behind the Pope was the assembly of the cardinals, priests, and a great number of highly educated officials, who never, even in the darkest and wildest days, lost sight altogether of the very grand idea of a divine world dominion."[128]

Pope Urban may not have been the caliber of administrator as his predecessor Gregory VII, but by all contemporary accounts he was by far the

[127] *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, Trans. (from the Greek) E.R.A. Sewter (London & New York: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 54
[128] Wells, H. G.; *The Outline of History; Volume 2*; 560.

better orator. At the Council of Clermont in 1095 he roused the masses – nobleman and commoner alike – to 'take up the cross' for the First Crusade to free Jerusalem from the infidels. The very name of 'crusader' comes from the Latin for the cross that was to be sewn on their capes and emblazoned on their shields as 'Christian soldiers.' There are several versions of the Pope's oration on that day, the following excerpt being representative of the whole,

> Consider, therefore, that the Almighty has provided you, perhaps, for this purpose, that through you He may restore Jerusalem from such debasement. Ponder, I beg you, how full of joy and delight our hearts will be when we shall see the Holy City restored with your little help, and the prophet's, nay divine, words fulfilled in our times. Let your memory be moved by what the Lord Himself says to the Church: 'I will bring thy seed from the East and gather thee from the West.' God has already brought our, seed from the East, since in a double way that region of the East has given the first beginnings of the Church to us. But from the West He will also gather it, provided He repairs the wrongs of 1 Jerusalem through those who have begun the witness of the final faith, that is the people of the West. With God's assistance, we think this can be done through you.
>
> If neither the words of the Scriptures arouse you, nor our admonitions penetrate your minds, at least let the great suffering of those who desired to go to the holy places stir you up. Think of those who made the pilgrimage across the sea! Even if they were more wealthy, consider what taxes, what violence they underwent, since they were forced to make payments and tributes almost every mile, to purchase release at every gate of the city, at the entrance of the churches and temples, at every side journey from place to place: also, if any accusation whatsoever were made against them, they were compelled to purchase their release; but if they refused to pay money, the prefects of the Gentiles, according to their custom, urged them fiercely with blows. What shall we say of those who took up the journey without anything more than trust in their barren poverty, since they seemed to have nothing except their bodies to lose? They not only demanded money of them, which is not an unendurable punishment, but also examined the callouses of their heels, cutting them open and folding the skin back, lest, perchance, they had sewed something there. Their unspeakable cruelty was carried on even to the point of giving them scammony to drink until they vomited, or even burst their bowels, because they thought the wretches had swallowed gold or silver; or, horrible to say, they cut their bowels open with a

> sword and, spreading out the folds of the intestines, with frightful mutilation disclosed whatever nature held there in secret. Remember, I pray, the thousands who have perished vile deaths, and strive for the holy places from which the beginnings of your faith have come. Before you engage in His battles, believe without question that Christ will be your standard-bearer and inseparable forerunner.[129]

At the close of Urban's sermon, the crowd rose to its feet shouting *Deus Volt! Deus Volt!* Men quickly volunteered for the expedition, seeking out their bishop to receive his blessing and the cross of his region to be sewn on his garment. Robert, Duke of Normandy and eldest son of William the Conqueror, was the highest ranking nobleman to stand for the First Crusade, although Godfrey de Bouillon, a nobleman of lesser rank, was to become the hero of the expedition. Hugh, Count of Vermandois and brother of King Philip I of France, Robert, Count of Flanders, and Raymond, Count of Toulouse, also joined the quest. Guibert, Abbot of Nogent, traveled in armor and was to become the unofficial historian of the First Crusade. Though not a royal crusade, the First Crusade was indeed a noble one.

But the people were not willing to wait for the nobles to gather their armies and their armaments, their baggage and fodder for the thousands of horses that would carry them. Before the First Crusade was launched in 1096, the 'People's Crusade' had already set off from France through Germany, on the way to Palestine by way of the Balkans and Asia Minor. This large but motley crew was led by Peter the Hermit, an eccentric anchorite who brought firsthand accounts of the depredations suffered by Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. Peter first told his stories to the Pope, then accompanied Urban to Clermont, from whence he was commissioned by the Pope to continue preaching the crusade everywhere in Western Europe. Thousands and tens of thousands

[129] Version of Guibert de Nogent; Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2-5vers.html

joined him, a veritable army though without the slightest military training or leadership.

The People's Crusade was surpassed in pitiable ignorance only by the Children's Crusade, about which more later. Peter led this ridiculous army to the very walls of Constantinople, leaving paths of destruction behind among the Christian villages of Hungary and the Balkans. The problem was that the poor never traveled very far from home, so that when these peasants took to the highways, anyone that either looked or sounded different from themselves was taken to be an infidel or, worse, a Jew. When the swarms – for that is what they were, not brigades or division or corps of an army – passed through defenseless villages, the plundered, looted, and killed anyone who seemed to be 'foreign' and, thus, an infidel. Eventually, however, they encountered armies – the armies of the Bulgars, a nomadic Asiatic tribe that had converted to Christianity over the recent century. Handled by armed defenders, the peasant swarms were cut to pieces, and only a fraction of their original number reached Constantinople.

Yet even that fraction numbered in the tens of thousands, which gives some idea of the innumerable host that set out from France intending to deliver the Holy Land in the name of Christ. At Constantinople there were immediately recognized by the Emperor for the useless band of vagabonds that they were. Worse than useless, really, for they expected the Emperor to feed, cloth, and arm them for the balance of their journey. He locked the gates against them. After several weeks of their marauding the environs of Constantinople, Alexius arranged transport for the entire mass across the Bosphorus to the Asian side. Once there, they were again cut to shreds by the Islamic forces that had overrun that territory. Only a handful – amazingly including Peter – escaped and made the entire journey to Palestine.

What motivated so many people to such stupidity? It is hard to imagine anyone in the 21st Century attempting such a deluded venture as the People's Crusade, unless one considers the remarkable devotion to one's religion that

would enable a man to fly a fully fueled jumbo jetliner into a skyscraper in New York City. The motivation is the same on both accounts: assurance of heavenly bliss when once the 'enemies of God' have been eradicated. Urban was one of a long line of popes who had assiduously instilled such superstitious beliefs into the people of Christendom, so when it came time to rouse them to warfare, he touched the right nerve.

> He promised to all who would enlist the plenary remission of all the infinite penalties and penances they had incurred by their past sins, and the immediate protection of Peter, Paul, and the holy church, for their persons and estates, and pronounced an anathema upon any that should molest them.[130]

The actual First Crusade was somewhat more organized, and certainly better armed, than the forlorn People's Crusade. The armies made their way along basically the same land route as the peasants had taken, but being led by so many highborn men, the infantry accompanied by tens of thousands of mounted knights, the residents and defenders of the Balkan regions gave these crusaders a wide berth. Their moral leader was Godfrey, who seems to have succeeded in reining in the baser tendencies of all armies, so that the crusaders arrived at Constantinople without serious incident or loss. The Emperor Alexius gave the noble crusaders little better welcome than he had given the peasants, probably quite fearful that such a powerful force could easily turn aside and displace him from his own throne. He chose not to permit the crusaders entry into the imperial city, but sent food and drink out to them beyond the walls.

As it turned out, *these* crusaders were sincerely bent on liberating the Holy Land from the infidel and had no interest in conquering the emperor's territory (a statement that was not true of later crusades). They crossed the Bosphorus and proceeded to fight their way south toward Palestine. They conquered Edessa, a critical city in terms of logistics and supply, then Antioch, and later

[130] Newman; 459.

conquered the city of Acre, which would become the center of operations for future crusades. Finally, on the 15th of July, 1099, the men of the First Crusade stormed the walls of Jerusalem crying *Deus Volt! Deus Volt!* Jerusalem fell, and a great massacre of its inhabitants commenced. The hypocrisy of the entire concept of 'crusade' is captured in this description of the aftermath of Jerusalem's capture: "The slaughter was terrible; the blood of the conquered ran down the streets, until men splashed in blood as they rode. At nightfall, 'sobbing for excess of joy,' the crusaders came to the Sepulchre from their treading of the winepress, and put their blood-stained hands together in prayer."[131]

Godrey of Bouillon was proclaimed King of Jerusalem, though he refused to wear a crown of gold in the city where his Lord wore a crown of thorns. His reign, however, was sadly cut short by disease after only a year – an example of the killer that was to bring more crusaders to their graves than infidel arrows or swords. Due to a lull in the martial skills of the Saracens at this time, the crusaders were able to keep hold on Jerusalem until 1187. But the cost in men, materiél, and money was horrendous. Almost no commoner ever returned from a crusade, and very few noblemen did either. Should a safe round trip come to pass, it was more often than not the case that the lord was impoverished in both body and goods by his 'taking the cross.'

The Second Crusade:

The Second Crusade was the first 'royal' crusade, led by Louis VII, King of France, and the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad III. It was a miserable failure. Louis was, by all accounts, a pious man and an incompetent leader. The crusade was made famous, however, by the fact that Louis was accompanied by his incomparably beautiful (and incorrigibly headstrong) wife, Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine. Eleanor's uncle, Raymond, was the King of Antioch and thus essential to the success of the crusade. The French court had been plotting for a

[131] Wells; 564.

long time how to end the royal marriage, for Eleanor had borne Louis only girls – two – and her independent nature (and powerful duchy) unnerved the court of the French king. Allegations were leveled at her in Antioch of having an incestuous relationship with her uncle – allegations that have not a shred of historical evidence – and the king and queen publically separated in that city, making their own ways back to France.

A divorce was subsequently obtained by Louis, and Eleanor returned to Aquitaine from Paris. On route she was almost 'kidnapped' – most likely a trap set by the French king to make sure that Eleanor's next husband was a man of his own choosing. She was rescued through the intervention of a young knight by the name of William Marshall – who was destined to be the epitome of medieval chivalry, the only man known to have unhorsed Richard the Lionhearted. In the meantime, the young Count of Anjou, Henry fitzEmpress, was surreptitiously making his way to Aquitaine. Henry and Eleanor were married (she was nine years his senior), Henry went on to become the King of England and a perennial thorn in Louis' side, and Eleanor bore him five sons and three daughters. Fact is often far more entertaining than fiction.

The Third Crusade:

The Third Crusade was occasioned by the capture of Jerusalem by the Islamic forces of the greatest infidel general, Saladin. It also became the stage upon which Richard *Coeur de Lion* would become legend. It was the most royal of the crusades, with three monarchs joining forces (so to speak) to regain Jerusalem and secure Christianity's hold on *Outremer*.[132] Philip Augustus, the son and successor of Louis VII, and Emperor Frederick I 'Barbarossa' of the Holy Roman Empire were allied with King Richard in the prosecution of the Third Crusade. In spite of the blue blood, the crusade itself was, on balance, a failure.

[132] The name for Palestine among the Western Europeans of the Middle Ages. It comes from the French *outré –mer*, meaning 'over the sea.'

Richard and Philip Augustus were by no means friends, and the French king availed himself of every opportunity to stir up trouble for his English counterpart. Barbarossa, himself nearing seventy years of age, displayed his famous martial skill by defeating Saracen forces in Asia Minor. But he drowned while crossing a minor river, and accounts vary widely as to what exactly happened to him. The Germans arrived in *Outremer* led by Frederick of Swabia, Barbarossa's son and heir. But he was felled by disease, and the German contingent of the crusade accounted for very little.

Acre had also been lost to the Saracens, and when Richard finally arrived it had been under siege by the Christian armies for many months. The presence of the Lionheart vastly improved the morale of the troops (and incensed the French king), and the city was retaken in a matter of weeks. From there Richard proposed a strike south along the coast – enabling the troops to be easily provisioned by ship – toward Egypt. Cairo was the capital of Saladin's empire, and the trade route between Cairo and Jerusalem was the Muslim leader's main supply line. Richard wanted to cut it. Philip, with little or no strategic ability of his own, objected that the goal of the Crusade was to take Jerusalem – and to Jerusalem the armies must go. Richard was forced to yield, though as a concession to him the troops did attack and reclaim Joppa and Askelon. Richard was undefeated in battle and, at one point, rode along the front of the Saracen army taunting any to come out and fight him in single combat. No one dared.

> The memory of *Coeur de Lion*, of the lion-hearted prince, was long dear and glorious to his English subjects; and at the distance of sixty years it was celebrated in proverbial sayings by the grandsons of the Turks and Saracens against whom he had fought: his tremendous name was employed by the Syrian mothers to silence their infants; and if a horse suddenly started from the way, his rider was wont to exclaim, 'Dost thou think king Richard is in that bush?'[133]

[133] Gibbon; 492.

At this point Philip abandoned the crusade and returned to France, where he allied himself with Richard's younger brother John. The two stirred up a great deal of trouble for Richard in Normandy and England, to the point that Richard's aging mother – again, Eleanor – sent urgent word to the king that he must return or risk losing his kingdom. His troops weary of battle, many having fallen to disease (Richard himself came perilously close to death in this manner), Richard concluded a three-year truce with Saladin, vowing to return and complete the work he had begun. He never did. He was captured by the Duke of Vienna and held for ransom (hence the Robin Hood stories), finally reaching home three years later. Struck by a random arrow while besieging a rebellious castle in the province of Limoges, Richard died on April 6, 1199, almost exactly one hundred years after the conquest of Jerusalem during the First Crusade.

Other Crusades:

Pope Innocent III, the most powerful pontiff to that time and afterward, called for the Fifth Crusade. It was to be sponsored by the Venetian merchants, collateral to be raised by the knights themselves. When they were unable to secure Venetian loans, the Doge of Venice 'compromised' by requiring the crusaders to march against Constantinople. In spite of the pope's threatened excommunication of anyone who complied with this plan, the crusaders considered the Eastern imperial capital to be far more lucrative than *Outremer*. Constantinople fell to the Western forces in 1204, and its treasures were looted. The 'Latin Empire of Constantinople' remained until 1261, when it was retaken by the Greeks under Michael Palæologus, who proclaimed himself emperor.

Also under Innocent III, and after the debacle of the Fifth Crusade, the Sixth Crusade progressed from the ridiculous to the sublime. Ostensibly led by the German Emperor Frederick II, a man of very questionable fidelity to the Christian religion, there were no battles fought to regain Jerusalem, or any other city of *Outremer*, for that matter. Frederick II was a reluctant crusader, and

tended to get along better with his would-be enemies than with his own pope. In the end, he negotiated a safe-conduct treaty for Christian pilgrims, and managed to secure via diplomacy more peace and security in Jerusalem than his predecessors and successors did by way of war. Innocent III did not see things this way, and herein lies some of the tragic humor of the Sixth Crusade.

> Frederick II was first excommunicated for not going on crusade, then for going without the Pope's permission; and he was denounced as an infidel for showing that, with the Saracens, more could be obtained by negotiation than by force.[134]

The Eighth Crusade was led by the pious King Louis IX of France, who would become the only European monarch canonized by the Roman Catholic Church (as Saint Louis). "His army was almost completely destroyed and he was taken captive; but he had the satisfaction of visiting Nazareth in sackcloth on a permit issued by the Sultan of Damascus."[135] The irony of the Eighth Crusade, led by a French king, is that the target was Cairo and not Jerusalem, following the sound reasoning of Richard that was frustrated by his partner in that crusade, the French king Philip Augustus.

> [F]ollowing the advice of the count of Arois, who argued that whoso wanted to kill a snake should first strike its head, Louis marched in the direction of the capital, Cairo…The army was harassed by a sleepless foe, and reduced by fevers and dysentery. The Nile became polluted with the bodies of the dead. At Mansourah the Turks dealt a crushing defeat. On the retreat which followed, the king and the count of Poitiers were taken prisoners. The count of Artois had been killed. The humiliation of the Crusades had never been so deep.[136]

The Eighth Crusade spent the last of the crusading spirit of Western Europe; the crusades for the deliverance of *Outremer* were effectively at an end. But if St. Louis' crusade saw the depths of crusading humiliation, the depth of tragedy and folly occurred during the Children's Crusade some years before. In

[134] Johnson; 249.
[135] Newman; 460.
[136] Schaff; 284.

1212 a French youth by the name of Stephen (the poor did not have cognomen, or last names) traveled by foot around the French countryside, gathering together a large band of children "under the enthusiasm of the time."[137] A similar movement occurred in Germany at about the same time. The outcome of both was the same: many children died of exposure, and those who made it to Genoa to seek passage onboard ship to *Outremer*, were deceived and sold into slavery.

The crusades did little to advance the peace and security of Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land, and succeeded in nothing more than depopulating Western Europe of hundreds of thousands of able-bodied working men. "By the time of the Third Crusade, the magic and wonder had gone out of these movements altogether. The common people had found them out. Men went, but only kings and nobles struggled back; and that often only after heavy taxation for a ransom."[138] The incompetence with which the crusades were prosecuted, the promises of divine assistance (as the men were told they were doing the work of God, and fighting the enemies of Christ), and the obvious political cupidity of the popes, did irreparable damage to the prestige of Rome itself. "The strength of the papacy lay in the faith men had in it, and it used that faith so carelessly as to enfeeble it. Rome has always had too much of the shrewdness of the priest and too little of the power of the prophet."[139] As the crusades came to an end, the Renaissance was just picking up steam. With this intellectual revolution, the bishops of Rome would find their hands more than full of problems very much closer to home than *Outremer*. This sad chapter in Church History finally came to an end.

[137] Newman; 461.
[138] Wells; 566.
[139] *Ibid.*; 569.

Session 8: **The Highest of the High Middle Ages**

Text Reading: **John 14:16 - 21**

"In the church's desire to rule the world
it forfeited its spiritual power and became part of the world."
(J. L. Neve)

The period from around the turn of the first Christian millennium to the century before the Protestant Reformation is often referred to as the High Middle Ages. Within this bracket of time, the 13th Century stands out as the pinnacle – the greatest century within a relatively noteworthy segment of human and Church history. For the Church – still the *Catholic* Church, of course – the 13th Century was as great a time as the 9th and 10th Centuries were low: the darkest of the Dark Ages in the latter case, and the Highest of the High Middle Ages in the former. Neve writes simply, "The thirteenth century was the golden age of Roman Catholicism."[140] The reality of European life made its closest approach to the ideal of 'Christendom' – the Holy Roman Empire under the supreme temporal and spiritual authority of the pope – in this century. Scholasticism attained its highest form in the masterful theologian/philosopher Thomas Aquinas, and papal power was never wielded with more effective influence than during the pontificate of Innocent III. This was the high water mark of Catholic Christianity – all ages before and after fall into the shadows of its glory.

One element was lacking, and that noticeably so: the emperor. During the incomparable reign of Innocent III on the papal throne, the imperial tenure of Frederick II was just beginning. It would last through the first half of the century, and Frederick II would distinguish himself from his predecessors, and most of the other kings of Europe, as being the mostly fully *atheistic* man to have lived in this very religious age. Not simply a practical atheism – a tacit nod to the religion from a life devoid of any piety – would suffice for Frederick II. He

[140] Neve; 198. Philip Schaff uses the same phrase, 'golden age' to describe this era of Church History.

openly avowed atheism at a time when to do such a thing not only brought one's soul, but also his realm, into imminent peril. Frederick II was the providential thorn in the papal side.

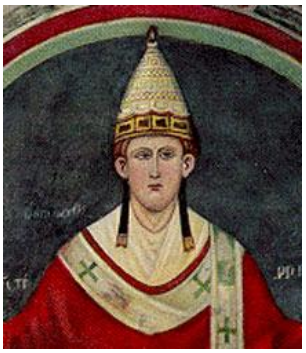
Another king also brought ignominy to the century's opening years: England's less than illustrious King John I. John was a practical atheist, a political believer, and a deeply immoral man. During his reign the pope brought England to her knees through the interdict, almost effected the invasion of England through the excommunication of John, and ended up owning the realm in fief as the liege lord to the current and all future English kings. It is no coincidence that England has never had a John *II*.

Clearly the 'noble' ideal of a united Christian empire in Europe was not in accordance with the Divine Providence, for there is no other explanation for the fact that such profound miscreants as Frederick II and John I would walk this earth at the same time as the most powerful pope of the Catholic Church's entire history, Innocent III. Nor can one explain in any other manner the presence of the only monarch for centuries both before and after this time, who openly espoused atheism, during the same years as Albertus Magnus, the *universal doctor*, Bonaventura, the *seraphic doctor*, and Thomas Aquinas, the *angelic doctor* all lived and wrote and taught. If one did not hold to a biblical and Christian worldview, with its clear understanding of the will of God being worked out through the affairs of men, one might see the light and dark forces of the Yin and the Yang at work in the incomparably eventful 13th Century.

The Greatest Pope, Bar None:

Gregory VII – formerly Hildebrand – started the momentous work of reforming the papacy and organizing the Roman Curia as a quasi judicial institution whose tentacles were to penetrate the royal and Episcopal courts of all Europe. He did not live to see the fruition of his labors, but his successors by and

large carried on his work, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and skill. Urban II made strides for the papal power through the preaching of the First Crusade.



Innocent III (1160-1216)

Alexander III (reigned 1159-81) navigated through political waters troubled by the presence of Henry II of England and his archbishop, Thomas Beckett, and increased papal influence as a result. The trajectory of papal power and influence was definitely upward, and reached its apex with the ascension at age thirty-seven of Innocent III, without argument the most powerful pontiff in the history of the Roman Church. Schaff, with his usual bent toward hyperbole, writes, "No other mortal has before or since wielded such extensive power."[141]

Innocent, born Lothario in the noble house of Conti in Italy, was a natural leader. He was noted for his administrative abilities and his native intelligence while still in his twenties. His young adult life, however, also illustrates just how political the papacy had become, with the highest office being exchanged among the most powerful families in Italy. The family of Orsini – political foes of the Conti – claimed the prize in 1191 when Giacinto Bobone became Pope Celestine III. Lothario wisely took early retirement, and devoted himself to the private (and quiet) study of literature. When Celestine died in 1198 the assembled cardinals pulled Lothario out of seclusion to become Pope Innocent III. As pope, Lothario was Gregory I, VII, Urban II, and Alexander III all rolled into one…and then some. "He successfully carried into execution the highest theory of the papal theocracy and anticipated the Vatican dogmas of papal absolutism and infallibility. To the papal title 'vicar of Christ,' Innocent added for the first time the title 'vicar of God.' He set aside the decisions of bishops and provincial councils, and lifted up and cast down kings."[142]

[141] Schaff; 152.
[142] *Idem.*

Innocent, though only thirty-seven at his elevation to the papal throne, acted immediately to secure and increase the influence of papal power across Europe. It is evident from his reign – and the accomplishments of a mere eighteen years – that he came to his pontificate with ideas already fully formed. "Innocent had completely grasped the papal idea of absolute civil and ecclesiastical control, and he approached more nearly to a realization of this than any other pope ever did."[143] Nor had any previous pope a higher opinion of the office than did Innocent. He famously (or infamously, depending on one's perspective), that the pope "stands in the midst between God and man; below God, above man; less than God, more than man. He judges all and is judged by none."[144]

Innocent's rise was timely, for in no prior or posterior era was the implicit faith of the masses so high as during this period of history. The first glow of the Crusades was, to be sure, tarnishing; but this did not seem to infect the general opinion of the people with regard to their pontiff. Most of the popes of the 12th Century were, at worst, indistinct, and many were men noted for their piety, reserve, and ability. Innocent was riding the crest of the wave in terms of the papacy's 'approval rating.' And he used this favor wisely and effectively to exert even greater papal control over almost the entirety of Europe. "Under Innocent's rule, the subjection of the entire Christian world to the Roman pontiff seemed to be near realization."[145] But through his sponsorship of the notorious Inquisition, Innocent also sowed the seeds that would reap a harvest of dissent and destruction in just a few generations' time. "More blood was shed at the hand of the Church during the pontificate of Innocent, and under his immediate successors carrying out his policy, than in any other age except the papal counter-Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[146]

[143] Newman; 513.
[144] Quoted by Schaff; 157.
[145] *Ibid.*; 159.
[146] *Idem.*

Early in his reign Innocent found himself in the middle of imperial politics, and occupying a very advantageous position at that. Upon the death of Emperor Henry VI, the care of his infant son, Frederick, was left by Henry's wife to Innocent himself. Two leaders of the Germanic people – Philip of Swabia and Otto IV Hohenstaufen, contended for the imperial dignity during Frederick's minority, and Innocent was looked upon by all involved to mediate a solution. He played for time, favoring Otto's claim initially until Philip's popularity became too widespread to be ignored. Innocent was on the verge of throwing his decisive support to Philip when the latter was assassinated, leaving Otto as the only viable candidate for the imperial office. Innocent crowned Otto as Holy Roman Emperor on the condition that the Germans vacate the south of Italy and Sicily, thus relieving tremendous pressure on the Papal States.

Otto – now Otto *IV* – acted in the manner becoming to the recent line of Germanic emperors. He promised the Pope everything, and delivered nothing. Innocent ended up excommunicating Otto and encouraging the German nobility to depose their emperor, which they gladly did. Innocent now realized that Frederick had grown up, so he proceeded to put him on his father's throne under the same conditions with regard to the Papal States, Southern Italy, and Sicily. Sadly for Innocent, however, this is the same Frederick who, as Emperor Frederick II, proved himself so obdurate to all things Christian. Frederick was a very effective ruler and an adept civil administrator who, from his capital in Palermo, Sicily, created an efficient and powerful central government over the German states, Naples, and Sicily. "A man of extraordinary culture, energy, and ability – called by a contemporary chronicler *stupor mundi* (the wonder of the world), by Nietzsche the first European, and by many historians the first modern ruler – Frederick

Frederick II (1194-1250)

established in Sicily and southern Italy something very much like a modern, centrally governed kingdom with an efficient bureaucracy."[147]

But in things pertaining to Catholic Christianity Frederick was, to say the least, not the ideal Christian monarch. Apparently he had developed a strong bitterness toward Innocent during his minority, for reasons unknown to history, and carried that antipathy onward through the succeeding popes, up until his own death in the middle of the century. It is reported that at the elevation of Cardinal Fieschi to Pope Innocent IV, Frederick remarked, "As cardinal Fieschi was my friend; but as pope he shall be my enemy."[148]

Upon being crowned emperor, Frederick had pledged to take up the cross in the latest crusade (the Fourth) that Innocent was gathering. Frederick dallied; Innocent excommunicated him. Frederick took up the crusade on his own; Innocent reiterated the excommunication. Frederick fraternized with the Saracens, concluding a favorable treaty with the Sultan for free access by Christian pilgrims to the holy sites in Palestine; Innocent declared him a reprobate and a heretic. But Innocent died in 1216, and Frederick lived on for another thirty-four years to torment successive occupants of the papal throne.

Innocent had more success in his dealings with the hapless youngest son of the formidable Henry II of England and his equally formidable queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine. John Lackland - so denominated in a jest by his father due to the fact that, as youngest son, he had no titled land – schemed and connived to rob the throne from his older brother, Richard *Coeur de Lion*. Upon Richard's death John seized the throne and probably had his nephew, Arthur, put to death (Arthur, being the son of Geoffrey who was between Richard and John in primogeniture, had the legal right to the throne). John's reign of seventeen years, from 1199 until 1216, was a continual display of perfidy, immorality, and political ineptitude the likes of which England has rarely seen in its 1,000 years

[147] Detwiler, Donald S. *Germany: A Short History* (Southern Illinois University Press; 1999) p. 43.
[148] Newman; 516.

since the Conquest. The English king picked a fight with Innocent over the vacant archbishopric of Canterbury. John rejected the candidate elevated by the monks of Canterbury and raised his own, politically-motivated, candidate to the position. The monks appealed to Innocent, who proceeded to set aside both contenders and appoint his own man, Stephen Langton, to the post. Langton would go on to be one of the most effective and faithful occupants of the episcopal throne at Canterbury, but in the beginning King John was having none of it. In spite of threats of papal interdict and excommunication, John would not permit Langton entry into England and, after the first thunderbolt (interdict) descended from Rome, the king responded with uncommon cruelty and rapaciousness toward the clergy and any Italians he found within his realm. Finally the papal Zeus hurled the bolt of excommunication, issuing a bull freeing John's subjects from all ties of fealty, and calling upon the Christian kings of Europe to depose John by military force. France's king Philip Augustus relished the thought of gaining England to his dominions, and launched an ill-fated invasion attempt that actually drove the English nobility to support the despised John.

John finally buckled, submitted himself abjectly as a 'penitent son of the Church,' and granted all of England to the Pope, to be returned to John in fief. In other words, the king sold his realm to the pope and consigned himself and his successors as vassals to the Roman Bishop in perpetuity. This was more than the English nobility could take, and before long they had John militarily cornered at Runnymede, an island in the Thames just outside of London, where the king was forced to sign the famous *Magna Carta* – the Great Charter. John quickly repudiated the Charter and, ironically, found ardent support in none other than Innocent III, who despised all talk of 'freedom' and 'rights.' John fled from his pursuing barons, trying to cross the 'Wash' – a tidal lowlands in eastern England – and managed to irretrievably lose the crown jewels of the land in the flowing tide. During the journey, John contracted a fatal case of dysentery, and died

unlamented by anyone outside of his immediate family, on October 18, 1216. Although the king may not have heard the news, his foe-turned-ally Pope Innocent III had left this world only three months prior.

During Innocent's momentous tenure as the Roman Bishop, the Eastern capital of Christendom, Constantinople, was besieged and conquered by the Latin forces of the Fifth Crusade. Although Innocent condemned the act, and excommunicated its perpetrators, he lost no time in consolidating his newfound power over the Greek branch of Christianity. He also involved himself successfully in dynastic struggles as far away as Poland, Hungary, and Norway. The sway of papal authority and power had never extended so far as it did under Innocent III. Late in his pontificate he convened one of the most significant ecclesiastical councils in the history of the Church, known as the Fourth Lateran Council (also as the Twelfth Ecumenical Council of the Church). It was at this council that the doctrine of transubstantiation received full ecclesiastical sanction and all who opposed it deemed heretical. And it was at the Fourth Lateran Council that the *Inquisition* was launched, and an episode begun in Church History every bit as sinister, if not more so, than the Crusades.

From a historical viewpoint, it is hard to imagine that a Reformation could have occurred during the 16th Century had the successors to Innocent III possessed even a fraction of his vigor. From a Protestant viewpoint, one must still 'give the devil his due,' and admit that Innocent III was surely the highpoint of the papacy, at least inasmuch as that ecclesiastical system strived for the spiritual dominion of the temporal world. Kurtz provides an excellent summary of just what Christianity experienced under the pontificate of Innocent III, a season of influence that would never again be realized.

> For a time, during the pontificate of Celestine, it seemed doubtful whether the results achieved by the policy of Hildebrand would prove lasting. But in 1198 Innocent III, the greatest Pope whom Rome has ever seen, ascended the chair of Peter. With him the Papacy rose to the highest conceivable stage of influence

> and authority. In strength of mind and purpose Innocent was nowise inferior to Gregory; in learning, acuteness, and general ability, he was his superior; while his piety, moral purity, enthusiasm, and devotedness to the interests of the Church were at least as great, and perhaps more deep and ardent than in the case of his great predecessor.[149]

Ironically, and inexplicably, Innocent III was never denominated 'the Great' by either his peers or his posterity, and to date has not been elevated to 'Blessed' by papal beatification, the penultimate step toward canonization.

The Summit of Scholasticism:

The resurgent papacy garnered valuable support from several monastic orders during the 13th Century, helping to solidify the perception of absolute papal authority and infallibility. The *Order of Preachers*, better known as the Dominicans, was established by Dominic in 1215 and officially recognized as a mendicant order by Pope Honorius III in 1216. The *Order of Friars*, much more familiarly known as the Franciscans, was organized by the famous Francis of Assisi and received papal approbation in 1209. These were the great preaching orders whose monks did not cloister themselves away from the surrounding world, but lived, worked, and most importantly, *preached* in the major cities of Europe. They were devoted to study, though only within the rigid lines established by Church tradition, and became the papacy's strike force against 'heresies' throughout Western Europe. "They arose at a time when heresy was spreading rapidly in France, Italy, and elsewhere, and constituted the most effective agency that the hierarchy employed to crush out dissent."[150]

The Franciscans, or *Minorites* (or, also, *Friars Minor*), took their lead from the emotional and ascetic life of Francis, their founder, and tended to be the more allegorical in interpretation, mystical in devotion, and Spartan in lifestyle. The story of Francis is fairly well known, but bears repeating in its broad outline

[149] Kurtz, *The History of the Christian Church*; 388.
[150] Newman; 455.

here. He was born in Assisi, Italy of an Italian merchant father and a French mother. His name was actually Giovanni, but his father nicknamed him Francesco – or 'little Frenchman' – in honor of his mother. Growing up in a wealthy merchant's home, Francis was accorded the best education available, yet he persistently showed contempt for his father's trade and wealth. Eventually he renounced his father and his patrimony, and embraced a life of poverty as being most like Jesus Christ his Lord. He claimed to have had multiple visions and direct conversations with God, and to have received the *stigmata*, or signs of the cross (pierced hands, side, and feet). This was widely viewed as a symbol of divine favor, and many came to hear Francis preach, listen to his views on life and religion, and to become his disciples. His life, perhaps due to the strictures he kept himself under, was a short one: he died in 1226, only forty-four years of age. Francis was canonized in 1228, a remarkable two years after his death.

Pope Innocent III informally established the *Rule of Francis*, and the Order of Friars Minor was consecrated officially in 1232 by Innocent's successor, Honorius III. Its members renounced all worldly goods and private ownership of property, and embraced an ascetic life of service to the community, especially through preaching and teaching. It was not long before the Franciscans were well represented within the faculties of the growing number of universities in Western Europe. Their practical theology – *philosophy of religious life*, as it were – was predominantly mystical, and emphasized love over knowledge as the proper path of the believer's heart to God. Though they lived prior to the establishment of the minorite order, Bernard of Clairvaux and Hugo of St. Victor represented the same mystical blend of faith and reason in the 12th Century. Conversely, though he lived long after the death of both Bernard and Hugo, Francis would have given his 'amen' to the words attributed to both of his spiritual predecessors, "God is more easily sought and found through prayer than by disputation," and "God is known so far as He is loved."

Dominic, the founder of the second (though not secondary) preaching order of the 13th Century, was a far different man than Francis. Little is known of his childhood, and less of his parentage. Allegedly he had an uncle who was an archbishop, which familial connection would help explain the excellent education that Dominic received as a youth. While serving as secretary to the Bishop of Osma on a diplomatic journey to Denmark on behalf of the King of Castile, Dominic encountered the Cathars in southern France. These were a sect within Catholic Christianity that held Gnostic and dualistic tenets, and which was declared heretical by Rome and outlawed. Dominic's experience among the Cathars intensified his desire to defend the catholic faith through disputation and preaching. Hence the Dominical Order tended afterward to be the more intellectual, and disputatious, of the two. Dominic himself received the official papal blessing for his mendicant order, also from Honorius III, in 1216. Perhaps the pope's eagerness to grant charter to the Dominicans ahead of the Franciscans (by some sixteen years) arose out of his belief that the more intellectual Dominicans would serve as more effective combatants against heretics than the more mystical, and peace-loving, Franciscans. Interestingly, however, Dominic himself adopted the Rule of Francis late in life and the Dominicans adopted the devotion to poverty espoused by the Franciscans.

These two orders grew side-by-side in the 13th Century, and each had noble representatives who raised the stature of their brethren by their piety, learning, and ability to teach and preach. Together, the Minorites and the Preachers, as they were known colloquially, brought the era of Scholasticism to its summit, and established the methodology of the Schoolmen for several centuries to come. In addition, however, to their own study of the Church fathers (and the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*, the standard theological textbook of the age), the scholars of the 13th Century were introduced to Aristotle, ironically by way of the Moorish and Jewish philosophers of Spain.

Statue of Averroes in Cordoba, Spain

Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin Rušd, a 12th Century Islamic scholar and philosopher much better known to the Western world as *Averroes*, was a Renaissance man before the Renaissance. His studies and his knowledge touched upon theology, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and mathematics – just to name a few branches. But his specialty, at least as far as his impact on Christian Europe, was his reading and defense of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Averrores' translations of Aristotle's Greek manuscripts from the Arabic to the Latin, hence second generation translations, introduced The Philosopher to the Western mind. Since the latter days of the Roman Empire, the leading Greek philosophers among the Romans and their European heirs were Zenos (Stoicism) and Plato (Platonism and neo-Platonism). For Christian theology in the post-Roman world, Plato was the *go-to* philosopher, not Aristotle. Indeed, even after the re-introduction of Aristotle in the 13th Century, many catholic theologians decried his philosophy as atheistic and heretical.

Perhaps the fascination of 13th Century theologians with Aristotle was the fact that his teaching, though 1,500 years old, was something *new* to them – and it was not part of the corpus of tradition handed down from the 'Fathers.' Hence, to some extent and within the bounds of orthodoxy, the study of Aristotle was fair game for men whose minds longed to chew on some new meat. Unfortunately for Christian theology, the study of Aristotelian philosophy alongside the professed adherence to Augustinian theology produced a synthesis of untenable ideas, and further corrupted the already decaying theology of the Catholic Church.

Aristotle influenced everyone in 13th Century scholarship, it seems, but his philosophy did not affect everyone equally. The Franciscans, due to their more mystical frame of mind, were less influenced by this *natural* philosopher and

adhered more closely to the Augustinian line. The Dominicans, however, tended to swallow the Philosopher whole – hook, line, and sinker. In the 13th Century these two orders, and their two different responses to Aristotelian philosophy, were each represented by two great scholars – a master and his greater disciple – and these four men brought Scholasticism to its highest form.

Alexander and Bonaventura:

Alexander of Hales was an English Franciscan renown for his scholarship from his native land to Italy. He was referred to by his students as the *Irrefragable Doctor* and *the King of Theologians*. Having studied and received his degree at the University of Paris, he became one of its leading instructors. He was one of the first European doctors to have the entirety of Aristotle's works to hand, and he made the first attempt at a synthesis between the Philosopher's writings and Christian orthodoxy.

At the heart of Aristotle's teaching – and in starkest contrast to that of his master, Plato – was the view that universals do not exist *before* the particulars in which they inhere, but rather *only in* those particulars. In other words, Aristotle denied the universal 'duckness' as having any existence or any meaning, apart from the existence of 'ducks.' This seemingly innocuous philosophical tenet would loom massively in later debates (particularly during the Reformation) with regard to the reality of such Roman Catholic concepts as transubstantiation. Along Aristotelian lines, and massaged by favorable Schoolmen, all things that the Church pronounced to be so, are so by virtue of the authority of the Church and of the reality that such pronouncements create in the concept itself. Thus transubstantiation *becomes* reality as a concept because it has *become* reality in practice.

This process of synthesis had the effect of separating Faith from Reason, and Alexander of Hales participated in the divorce that would be finalized later by Thomas Aquinas. "In worldly things, knowledge proceeds from rational

conviction; in spiritual things, faith precedes knowledge."[151] Again, the bare words seem innocent and harmless, until one realizes that the 'faith' of which the Schoolmen spoke was not founded solely upon the revealed will and word of God in Scripture, but also and more significantly upon the pronouncement of the Church. Thus the papacy received valuable support from the scholars, that whatever the Roman Pontiff declared to be, was to be believed regardless of the firmness of its rational content.

Hales was one of the first to elucidate some of the more repugnant Catholic doctrines to Protestants. "He declared for the indelible character of baptism and ordination. By elaborate argument he justified the withdrawal of the cup from the laity and stated the new doctrine of penance. He is especially famous for having defined the fund of merit – *thesaurus meritorum* – the vicious doctrine upon which the practice of distributing and selling indulgences was based…In all these matters he had a controlling influence over the later Schoolmen."[152]

It is well that evangelicals be reminded of the net effect of this synthesis between Aristotle and Augustine. This venture solidified papal absolutism and bolstered papal infallibility, and created the intellectual vacuum into which the Reformers poured their refreshingly scriptural teachings. Yet the historian must refrain from passing ultimate judgment upon the Schoolmen, for they were products of their culture and time, and many lived such lives as would give ardent testimony to their professions of faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. In addition, not all of their writings are corrupted by Aristotelian influences; many are true to Scripture and of high devotional content. One such devout and pious Schoolman was the student and disciple of Hales and one of the shining stars of medieval literature. His name was **Bonaventura**. But his life and teaching was providentially set next to that of the more famous **Thomas**

[151] Schaff; 652.
[152] *Idem.*

Aquinas, and so we will treat of the two men – the two disciples – together at the close of this lesson.

Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas:

Corresponding to Alexander of Hales among the Dominicans was Albert, "the most learned and widely read man of the thirteenth century."[153] He is known historically as Albertus Magnus, or Albert the Great. Born in 1193 in Bavaria, Albert lived the longest of the four leading Schoolmen under consideration, dying in 1280 at the almost impossible (for the times) age of 87. Albert traveled widely in Europe, holding teaching positions at the universities of Freisburg, Hildesheim, Strassburg, Regensburg, Cologne, and Paris. It was at Cologne that he encountered as a student Thomas Aquinas, who would prove to be his most devoted and more famous disciple.

Albert's genius was not original; he became a more thorough reader, and hence a more ardent transmitter, of Aristotle than was Alexander of Hales. One historian comments with regard to Albert, "Perhaps the world has had no greater purveyor of a knowledge not his own."[154] Albert parsed Aristotle from whatever he could find of the Philosopher, be it original writings or the commentaries of Arabic scholars such as Averroes. "Albert's labours finally put within reach of his contemporaries the sum of philosophy and science contained in the works of Aristotle."[155] Aristotle's emphasis on Nature, and hence the ability of human reason to comprehend through sensory perception all that which is natural, served as an early impetus to what would later become Modern Science. But the spreading chasm between that which can be known through Reason, and that which must only be known by Faith, would also produce the ultimate divorce between Religion and Science that we have experienced in our own time.

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[153] Schaff; 653.
[154] Taylor, Henry Osborn, *The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages* (London: Macmillan & Co.; 1925); 450.
[155] *Ibid.*; 451.

Still, these subsequent developments cannot be blamed entirely on Albert's love of learning, and his attempt to be as encyclopedic in that learning as the sources available to him would allow. "Albert saw into a new world. His knowledge is often at fault, but sometimes his statements are prophetic of modern discovery."[156] Perhaps in the final analysis Albert was more a 'natural philosopher' – the ancient description of what we would call today a 'scientist' – than he was a theologian. The problem for Albert is that, in his day, no such distinction was made or permitted. Scholarship was pursued within the confines and under the edicts and constraints of the Church. This would cause great conflict in the future, when men who were truly scientists began to posit the Sun as the center of the planetary system, but that is another story.

Albert's great disciple was Thomas Aquinas, who was as devoted a student to his master as the master was to his student. Already an old man in 1274, when Thomas died, Albert took himself to the University of Paris to defend the teachings of his former student. Albert was the compiler of knowledge; Thomas the original thinker who transmuted that knowledge into a new and powerful system of theological philosophy. Albert was perhaps the most thoroughly read, and the most comprehensive scholar of the age, but Aquinas was "the most potent genius of scholasticism."[157]

The life of Aquinas, a Dominican, parallels that of Bonaventura, a Franciscan. The two were roughly contemporaries (Bonaventura was older by four years; they died within five months of each other in 1274). They occupied competing chairs in theology at the University of Paris, and were good-natured tempters of one another's students to their own lectures rather than those of the 'opponent.' But in physical stature as well as in intellectual and emotional framework, the two were as different as different can be. Bonaventura was slight

[156] Schaff; 655.
[157] Taylor; 463.

of build whereas Aquinas an ox of a man.[158] Bonaventura was the mystical Franciscan, emphasizing the soul's pathway to God through faith, contemplation, and prayer. Of Bonaventura the historian Henry Osborn Taylor writes, "His Augustinian soul held to the pre-eminence of the *good* over the *true*, and tended to shape the second to the first. So he maintained the primacy of *willing* over knowing."[159] But Bonaventura was not antagonistic to knowledge through the exercise of reason. In his treatise, *The Mind's Path to God*, he exhibits the scholastic tendency to list steps – six of this, nine of that, three parts to this, five impressions to that – and rational knowledge through sensory perception is usually among the lists.

In this treatise, as in many scholastic writings of the age, there is an emphasis on man's seeking the *summum bonum*, the 'highest good,' and having achieved that goal, of experiencing the *beatific vision*, the true, spiritual sight of God. For instance, Bonaventura writes, "Human desire, therefore, seeks nothing unless it be the highest good or something which leads to it or something which has some resemblance to it."[160] And on the soul's ultimate goal, the vision of God, he writes,

> It happens that we may contemplate God not only outside of us but also within us and above us (*note the three ways to contemplate God*). Thus we contemplate Him outside through His traces, inside through His image, and above us through His light…Those who exercise themselves in the first manner have already entered into the atrium of the tabernacle; the second have entered into the sanctum; but the third have entered into the Holy of Holies with the High Priest.[161]

Bonaventura's writing style mirrored his life: devotional and emotional, like the founder of his mendicant order, Francis. "He belongs to those

[158] Aquinas was ridiculed by his fellow students due to his size and his reticence to speak, as the 'Dumb Ox.' When he heard this epithet, Albertus Magnus reputedly said that 'This ox will make a bellowing across Europe that will be heard for ages.' Or some such prophetic praise; likely apocryphal.
[159] Taylor; 435.
[160] Bonaventura, *The Mind's Road to God* (The Library of Liberal Arts; 1953); 25.
[161] *Ibid.*; 34.

intellectually gifted men – Augustine, Anselm, Hugo of St. Victor – whose mental and emotional powers draw always to God, and minister to the conception of the soul's union wit the living spring of being…No one should expect to find among his compositions any independent treatment of secular knowledge for its own sake. Rather throughout his writings the reasonings of philosophy are found always ministering to the sovereign theme."[162]

As to his philosophy, however, Bonaventura seems to prefer Plato over Aristotle, as Taylor says, "So it appears that, among philosophers, the word of wisdom was given to Plato, and the word of knowledge to Aristotle."[163] Thomas, on the other hand, was the intellectual, eager for the exercise of his mind through Aristotelian philosophy and Augustinian theology. The massive extent of his labors, and the keen philosophical intellect which he brought to bear upon them, caused 'Thomism' to supplant Augustinianism as the predominant theological system of the Roman Catholic Church. His greatest tomes, *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles* are "the most influential work of all western medieval scholasticism."[164]

Thomas' own predilection caused him to emphasize human reason in the pursuit of truth. But as Aristotelian philosophy had taught him that the human mind is a blank slate – a *tabula rasa* – until written upon through sensory perception of the surrounding world, his theological system had to find a place for that knowledge that does not come through the senses, in particular, the doctrines of Christianity and of the Church. This is where the division between Reason and Faith begins, and Aquinas spent most of his few adult years widening the gap between them. He was a devoted son of the Church, and firmly defended the supremacy of the Roman papacy and the validity to faith of all that the Church pronounced to be true. But he was also a devoted *thinker* and student of natural philosophy, who believed that all rational knowledge was

[162] Taylor; 438.
[163] *Ibid.*; 435.
[164] *Ibid.*; 465.

received into the human mind via the five senses. He developed an elaborate theological system to hold these two divergent theories together. Roman Catholicism holds that he did so successfully; evangelical Protestantism is generally of another opinion.

> The unity of Thomas' personality lay in his conception of man's *summum bonum*, which sprang from his Christian faith, but was constructed by reason from foundation to pinnacle…To fulfill this purpose in its utmost compass, reason works with the material of all pertinent knowledge, fashioning the same to complete logical consistency of expression.[165]

Aquinas shared with Bonaventura the believer's desire to achieve the *beatific vision*, though he disagreed with his Franciscan counterpart as to the primary means by which man reaches that goal. To Bonaventura the *beatific vision* was primarily a spiritual seeing of the divine perfection; to Aquinas it was primarily an intellectual vision of the divine nature. Bonaventura valued the *good* above the *true*; the opposite ranking was taken by Aquinas.

> Although both the good and the true have been taken as convertible with being, yet they differ in their conception; and that the true is prior to the good appears from two considerations: First, the true is more closely related to being, which is prior to the good; for the true refers to being itself, simply and directly; while the ratio of the good follows being as in some way perfect and therefore desirable. It is clear from this that cognition naturally precedes desire. Therefore, since the true refers to cognition, and the good relates to desire, the true is prior to the good.[166]

Taylor comments appropriately upon this passage, "This argument, whatever validity it may have, is significant of its author's predominantly intellectual temperament, and consistent with his conception of man's supreme beatitude as the intellectual vision of God."[167]

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[165] Taylor; 466.
[166] Aquinas; quoted by Taylor; 471.
[167] *Ibid.*; 472.

The Greatest Century:

The rise of the papacy from Gregory VII to Innocent III elevated the authority of the Roman Pontiff to the highest level in history, both before and since. A position of such eminence was bound to attract less desirable occupants, men willing to pay for the title, and to kill for it. Subsequent popes would never measure up to the stature of Hildebrand or Lothario, and many would possess despicable natures. Yet the authority of Rome would be vaunted and pressed against kings, emperors, and bishops up until the Protestant Reformation. Europe gloried in the good popes; it would chafe under the bad ones to come.

Alongside the apex of papal power in the 13th Century came the summit of scholasticism through men like Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, Bonaventura, and Thomas Aquinas. Beyond the scope of this historical survey would be the mention of Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253) and Roger Bacon (1214-1294) of England, both significant contributors to the growth and stature of Scholasticism in the 13th Century. These men all had their Christian faith as the foundation of their "New Learning," but many of their successors would elevate the intellectual and rational aspect of learning – a process begun by Aquinas – over the less perceptible process of knowledge through revelation. The result would be the Renaissance, a period just around the corner in which human reason would be exalted and man would become 'the measure of all things.' Unintended consequences of the work of these illustrious Schoolmen, but historical consequences nonetheless.

Session 9: A Pause at the Peak – Thomas Aquinas

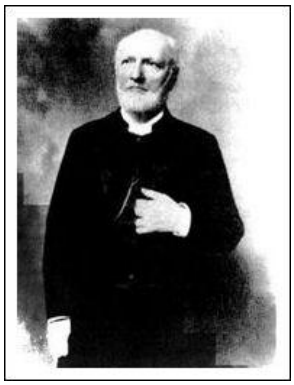
Text Reading:

"The closer a theological system approaches
to the biblical norm,
the more difficult it becomes for the church to maintain it inviolate."
(C. Gregg Singer)

In 1953, New Zealander Sir Edmund Hilary made history by being the first man to ascend to the summit of the tallest mountain in the world, Mt. Everest. His expedition involved over 400 men and took the better part of three months until, finally, Hilary and his Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, made the last grueling 4,000 ft to the peak, leaving the rest of the support team behind at the South Col base camp. After an exhausting effort, the pair spent only fifteen minutes at the summit, anxious to return to camp before darkness enveloped them and storms overtook them. Very few have repeated Hilary's achievement in the sixty years since, and so very few among mankind have any idea what the view is like from 29,048 ft above sea level. But one can imagine that, after such an effort, Hilary might have liked to spend a bit more time at the peak than fifteen minutes.

Hopefully the journey from the time of Pope Gregory the Great in the 6th Century to that of Pope Innocent III in the 13th Century has not been as arduous as the ascent of Mt. Everest. But the two are analogous in the sense that with the greatest pope in the history of Catholicism, and the greatest Scholastic theologian of the same era, we have reached the peak of Medieval Church History. Unlike Hilary, however, we are going to spend more than fifteen minutes at the summit. For there can be no real appreciation or understanding of the medieval Church, or of Roman Catholicism from that time to the present, with some familiarity with its greatest scholar and schoolman, Aquinas. Aquinas, who died in 1274, was canonized by Pope John XXII in 1323 and declared the *Angelic Doctor* by Pope Pius V in 1567. His place in Roman Catholic tradition and teaching,

however, was officially acknowledged by Pope Benedict XV who proclaimed Thomism to be the official teaching of the Church and honored Aquinas as "the master and patron of Catholic schools." Roger Olson writes, "It is impossible to overestimate his importance for the story of Christian theology and especially for the story of Roman Catholic theology. There he remains the standard, the norm, well into the twentieth century."[168] To this Philip Schaff adds, "He who understands Thomas understands mediæval theology at its best and will be in possession of the doctrinal system of the Roman Catholic Church."[169]



Philip Schaff (1819-93)

In keeping with Scholastic tradition, however, Thomas was not so much an original or innovative thinker as he was a master systematizer of the teachings of tradition. To this task – the common one of all schoolmen – Aquinas brought the keenest intellect, an indefatigable devotion to the mother Church, and an infatuation with the newly re-discovered teachings of Aristotle. Aristotle stimulated Thomas' love of knowledge, and challenged the traditional medieval epistemology of filtering all knowledge first through the Church's interpretation of divine revelation rather than through human reason and observation. While Aquinas would probably have agreed with Anselm's famous dictum, *credo ut intelligam* – 'I believe in order that I may understand' – he would have done so only provisionally. That is to say, throughout his life Thomas Aquinas remained a fervent believer in the theological doctrines of Christianity, and in the authority (perhaps even infallibility) of the Church and her spiritual head, the pope. Yet it was because of this ardent loyalty to the faith that Thomas struggled so mightily all his years to forge a sympathetic cooperation between the rationalism of Aristotle with the spiritualism of traditional Catholic teaching mediated down

[168] Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1999); 331.
[169] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: Volume V*; 675.

the centuries from Augustine. Scholars still debate the matter and degree of his success.

> Once again the church fell victim to the charm and fascination of Greek thought in its Aristotelian form, and once again its scholars sought to fashion a new apologetic which would rest upon a synthesis of Augustine and Aristotle rather than upon some adaptation of Platonism with the Christian revelation…The resulting Thomistic synthesis, although it was in appearance a medieval cathedral of the mind, rested upon very fragile foundations, and the theism of Augustine was replaced by a syncretistic apologetic whose theology allowed the unbelief of the Greek mind to have an undue influence in the molding of Western thought in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries.[170]

The problem was that Aristotle was basically a materialist. While he may have paid lip service to the existence of the spiritual realm and of deity, his system of thought was founded squarely on the principle that all human knowledge is mediated to the mind through the senses. While such a view is advantageous for the pursuit of the scientific knowledge of Nature through empiricism (observation) and experimentation, it does seem to preclude knowledge of the divine through revelation. But the medieval schoolmen – primarily the Dominicans and supremely Thomas Aquinas – attempted to hold fast to both forms of knowledge: *rational* knowledge through sensual perception, and *theological* knowledge through revelation. J. L. Neve, writing of the medieval scholastics in general, essentially summarizes Thomas' entire scholarly life when he says,

> With incomparable strength and and acumen never again attained the best talents of the Middle Ages devoted themselves to the work of welding the Augustinianism of the Church and the ecclesiastical law on the one hand and the Aristotelian philosophy on the other. At the same time the scholars held to the presuppositions that both parties exist by equal right and that nothing dare be broken off from either natural and [*sic*] revealed theology.[171]

[170] Singer, C. Gregg; *From Rationalism to Irrationality: The Decline of the Western Mind from the Renaissance to the Present* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co; 1979); 19.
[171] Neve; 199.

Therefore, as Thomas Aquinas was the Scholastic *par excellence* of this attempt at synthesizing Augustine and Aristotle, and as Thomism has dominated Roman Catholic thought for the eight centuries since, it is fitting that at least a brief summary be made of the system erected by this great 13th Century scholar. The scope of Thomas' studies was encyclopedic and a thorough analysis of his views and teachings would be a lifetime's labor. Yet there are certain points where Thomism impinges more directly on Church doctrine and practice than at other, more esoteric, points in his philosophy. Among the most significant of his philosophical theology, or theological philosophy, are the following, which will form the outline for this particular session:

- Aquinas' arguments for the proof of the existence of God.
- The Influence of Aristotle in Aquinas' analysis of the Trinity.
- Aquinas' defense of Divine Providence and Predestination.
- The development of Aquinas' Anthropology from the doctrine of Creation *ex nihilo*.
- Aquinas' Summary & Justification of the Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Can it be Proven that God Exists?

A perusal of either of Thomas Aquinas' greatest works - his apologetical masterpiece, *Summa Contra Gentiles* or his great systematic theology, *Summa Theologica* – will introduce the student to the medieval scholastic method of argumentation. First, a question is posed, such as "Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists." Then objections are noted that seem to support the negation of the question, as with *Objection 1* under this heading,

> It seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated. For it is an article of faith that God exists. But what is of faith cannot be demonstrated, because a demonstration produces scientific knowledge, whereas faith is of the unseen, as

> is clear from the Apostle (Heb. XI.1). Therefore it cannot be demonstrated that God exists.[172]

Such objections, usually numbering between one to three, are then refuted by the author's own view, with supporting references to Scripture, the writings of the Fathers, Augustine (often quoted by Aquinas as alone authoritative without any further support), and 'the Philosopher,' by whom is always meant Aristotle. In the next article from the one quoted above, Aquinas posits the question, 'Whether God Exists?' Objection 1 is then stated:

> It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the name *God* means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.[173]

This, along with one other similar 'objection,' leads Aquinas into the fivefold argument for the existence of God for which he has become famous.

> Aquinas presented five ways of rationally demonstrating the existence of God, and all five of them may be found in some form in Aristotle's philosophy. All five ways appeal to experiences human minds have in relation to the natural world and state that if God did not exist, these experiences would be meaningless or impossible. In fact, what is being experienced would not exist.[174]

> Thus, in Aquinas' own words,[175]

1. **The Argument from Motion**: "The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is moved is moved by another, for nothing can be moved except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is moved…Therefore, whatever is moved must be moved by another. If that by which it is moved be itself moved, then this also must needs be moved by another, and that by another

[172] Pegis, Anton C.; *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas; Volume One* (New York: Random House; 1945); 20.
[173] Pegis; 21.
[174] Olson; 338.
[175] From Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* on 'The Existence of God.' Quoted by Pegis, pp. 22-23.

again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover, seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover…Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, moved by no other; and this everyone understands to be God."

2. **The Argument from Causation**: "The second way is from the nature of efficient cause. In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause…Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, no any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God."

3. **The Argument from Possibility & Necessity:** "The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through something that is already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence – which is absurd…Therefore we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God."

4. **The Argument from Gradation:** "The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But *more* and *less* are predicated of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum…Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God."

5. **The Argument from Purpose (The *Teologocial Argument*):** "The fifth way is taken from the government of the world. We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end no fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move toward an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God."

In this line of argumentation, Aquinas departed from Aristotle of necessity. Aristotle believed in the eternality of matter, a concept with which no Christian can be in agreement. Furthermore, "even if the world were eternal…it would nevertheless need explanation because it is made up of finite, dependent things that beg explanation for their existence. They are dependent and caused, and if the entirety of reality were made up of such dependent and caused things, then it would not exist. The world needs an uncaused cause for its continuing existence if not for its beginning."[176] Aquinas' arguments stand alongside Anselm's *Ontological Argument* as medieval theology's best attempts at a rational proof for the existence of God. None prove the existence of the God self-revealed through divine Scripture, but each alone – and more powerfully all of them together – demonstrate irrefutably that a belief in God is far from irrational. Indeed, it is the highest manifestation of irrationality to attempt to *deny* the existence of God while at the same time *assuming* the existence of everything else. Truly "*the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'*" And Aquinas was no fool.

Aquinas' Interpretation of the Trinity:

One can hardly imagine a point of contact between revealed religion and natural philosophy more contentious than that of the Doctrine of the Trinity. Surely it is no matter for sensual perception or scientific observation, and thus it

[176] Olson; 339.

seems to both defy and contradict Reason. One cannot imagine 'the Philosopher' granting his philosophical imprimatur upon the doctrine. Aquinas attempts to bring this doctrine of faith under the critical light of human reason, and to provide a rational defense for the existence of three – and only three – *Persons* within the unity of God. His terminology of 'substance' and 'person,' 'essence' and 'nature' are largely borrowed from 'the Philosopher' with what seems to be a vain attempt to massage Aristotelian terms with Augustinian theology. In Question XXX of his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas begins with the First Article, "Whether there are Many Persons in God?" His logic flows from his definition of 'person' as representing a unique subset of reality, a 'subsistence' or 'relation' within the overall unit of reality. Hence, "it was shown above that this term *person* signifies in God a relation as subsisting in the divine nature. It was also established that there are many real relations in God. Hence it follows that there are many realities subsistent in the divine nature; which means that there are many persons in God."[177]

Following all of this is not as important as realizing that, at least here, Aquinas proves too much. He 'proves' a plurality in the divine nature and now has to limit that plurality to no more than three. This he attempts to do in the Second Article of the same section, but his reasoning comes off as special pleading.

> As was explained above, there can be only three persons in God. For it was shown above that the many persons are the many subsisting relations really distinct from one another. But a real distinction between the divine relations can come only from relative opposition. Therefore two opposite relations must needs refer to two persons; and if any relations are not opposite, they must needs belong to the same person. Since then paternity and filiation are opposite relations, they belong necessarily to two persons. Therefore the subsisting paternity is the person of the Father and the subsisting filiation is the person of the Son…We must consequently admit that spiration belongs to the person of the Father and to the person of the Son, inasmuch as it has no relative opposition

[177] Pegis; 299.

> either to paternity or to filiation; and consequently that procession belongs to the other person who is called the person of the Holy Spirit.[178]

At this point the air is feeling as thin as at the top of Mt. Everest. If nothing else, these excerpts illustrate the lengths to which the Scholastic theologians would go in the attempt to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy with orthodox, Catholic (meaning Augustinian) theology. Yet the weakness of Aquinas' argumentation lies in the assumptions he makes with regard to the 'relations' within the deity. He posits such relations as *paternity, filiation,* and *procession*; but these are simply the theological terms drawn from the ancient conflict over the doctrine of the Trinity and the Athanasian terminology put forth in the 4th Century to solve that controversy. Aquinas might also have posited *maternity*, which is in opposition both to paternity and filiation, and thus would necessitate a *fourth* person subsisting in God.

Furthermore, Aquinas' statement that *procession* is not an opposite relation to either the Father or the Son is a mere assertion based on the Nicene formulation of the Trinity *and* the Latin Church's position that the Holy Spirit *proceeds from both the Father and the Son*, an age-old bone of contention between the Latin and Greek wings of Christianity. While such procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son is certainly defensible from Scripture, Aquinas fails to defend it from Reason. This case is an excellent illustration of not only the meticulous interweaving of words used by Scholastic theologians in their convoluted attempts to weld together Philosophy and Theology, but also an excellent example of their consistent failure to do so *reasonably*. This would lead later generations of schoolmen to abandon the attempt, and to sever Faith from Reason completely.

[178] Pegis; 301.

Aquinas on Providence and Predestination:

When treating of the doctrines of Divine Providence and its corollary, Divine Predestination, Thomas Aquinas writes (pardon the anachronism) in as Reformed a tone as John Calvin himself. Amazingly for a 13th Century theologian, Aquinas yields not so much as one iota of the firm Augustinian view of absolute predestination – of absolute Divine Sovereignty over all events (again an anachronism) *whatsoever comes to pass*, including the salvation of every individual sinner who comes to be saved. Knowing the unmitigated devotion that Thomas Aquinas held to the hierarchy of the Roman Church, it is both surprising and refreshing to read from Question XXIII of *Summa Theologica* in which the theologian posits the question, "Whether Men are Predestined by God." He writes,

> *I answer that*, It is fitting that God should predestine men. For all things are subject to His providence, as was shown above. Now it belongs to providence to direct things toward their end, as was also said. The end towards which created things are directed by God is twofold: one which exceeds all proportion and ability of created nature; and this end is life eternal, consisting in the vision of God which his above the nature of every creature…The other end, however, is proportionate to created nature, in which end created being can attain according to the power of its nature. Now if a thing cannot attain to something by the power of its nature, it must be directed thereto by another…Hence, properly speaking, a rational creature, capable of eternal life, is led towards it, directed, as it were, by God. The exemplar of that direction pre-exists in God…Now the exemplar in the mind of the doer of something to be done is a kind of pre-existence in him of the thing to be done. Hence the exemplar of the aforesaid direction of a rational creature towards the end of life eternal is called predestination. For to destine is to direct or send. Thus *it is clear* that predestination, as regards its objects, is a part of providence.[179]

One has to love that last little phrase: *it is clear*! This paragraph sounds somewhat like what former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan once told a Congressional committee: "If what I am saying makes sense to you, clearly you

[179] Pegis; 239 (italics added).

have misunderstood me." But what is important in this confusing and convoluted paragraph is that Aquinas is establishing a doctrine of predestination which is as strong as was that of Augustine. Considering the fate of his predecessor Gottschalk in the 9th Century, it is a testimony to the place Thomas Aquinas held among his contemporaries that he was not run out of town on a rail for such views. He goes on to show that divine predestination cannot find its cause or motivation within the object predestined, but only flows from the mind of the one who predestines.

> Now providence is not anything in the things provided for, but is an exemplar in the mind of the provider as was proved above. But the execution of providence , which is called government, is in a passive way in the thing governed, and in an active way in the governor.[180]

But it is in the Third Article of this section that Aquinas shows himself to be in the same theological lineage that flows first from the Apostle Paul, then to Augustine, and finally to the Genevan Reformer Calvin three hundred years later. In answer to the question, "Whether God Reprobates Any Man?" Aquinas writes,

> *I answer that*, God does reprobate some persons…Thus, as men are ordained to eternal life through the providence of God, it likewise a part of that providence to permit some to fall away from that end; this is called *reprobation*. Thus, as predestination is a part of providence, in regard to those divinely ordained to eternal salvation, so reprobation is a part of providence in regard to those who turn aside from that end. Hence reprobation implies not only foreknowledge, but also something more, as does providence…Therefore, as predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory, so also reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin, and to impose the punishment of damnation because of that sin.[181]

Finally, Aquinas rejects any attempt to explain predestination on God's *foreseeing* anything in man – including faith – that would move the divine will to

[180] Pegais; 240.
[181] *Ibid.*; 241.

elect a sinner unto salvation. He writes in the Fourth Article that "Predestination logically presupposes election," because,

> Now providence…is the plan existing in the intellect directing the ordering of some things towards an end…But nothing is directed towards an end unless the will for that end already exists. Wherefore the predestination of some to eternal salvation logically presupposes that God wills their salvation; and to this belong both election and love: - love, inasmuch as God wills them this particular good of eternal salvation…election, inasmuch as He wills this good to some in preference to others…Election and love, however, are diversely ordered in God, and in ourselves: because in us the will in loving does not cause good, but we are incited to love by a good which already exists; and therefore we choose someone to love, and so election in us precedes love. In God, however, it is the reverse. For His will, by which in loving He wishes good to someone, is the cause of that good possessed by some in preference to others. Thus it is clear (!) that, logically, love precedes election, and election precedes predestination.[182]

Augustine and Calvin may have been able to say it more clearly and in fewer words, but neither said it more forcefully than Thomas Aquinas. But even Aquinas could be succinct, and we close this enjoyable section on the doctrine of predestination according to Thomas Aquinas with a brief, but powerful, summary. "Yet why He chooses some for glory, and reprobates others, has no reason, except the divine will. Whence Augustine says, *Why He draws one, and another He draws not, seek not to judge, if thou does not wish to err.*"[183]

The Anthropology of Thomas Aquinas:

At the very foundation of all religion is the notion that man is a complex creature comprising both physical body and spiritual soul. And underlying the Christian faith is the concept that man's soul is both immortal and capable of redemption. But all such views of human nature run contrary to the materialism of Aristotle, which therefore pose a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to any theologian attempting to synthesize Aristotle with Augustine. To his credit,

[182] Pegis; 243-244.
[183] *Ibid.*; 247.

Aquinas departs from Aristotle at all points where the Philosopher's materialism negates a principle fundamental to the Christian faith and to the biblical anthropology. In his apologetic work, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas strongly hints that there is a realm of knowledge beyond the sense perception of the human mind.

> Since everything is knowable so far as it exists in actuality, God, who is pure actuality, without any mingling of potentiality, is in Himself most knowable. But what is most knowable in itself, is not knowable to every intelligence because of the exceeding greatness of that which is to be known; as the sun, which is most visible, may not be seen by a bat, because of the excess of light.[184]

It is upon these preliminary stones that Aquinas builds his philosophy concerning the relative roles of Faith and Reason. By setting these two apart from each other, he set the stage for latter generations to bring about their ultimate divorce. Yet it does not appear that Aquinas committed this error; rather he defended faith as a necessary avenue of knowledge predicated on the realization that God – by the very definition of being God – transcends the natural faculties of man to comprehend. He writes, "The mode of cognition conforms to the nature of the knower. But our soul, so long as we live in this life, has its existence in corporeal matter. Wherefore, by nature it knows only things that have material form, or may through such be known. Evidently the divine essence cannot be known through the nature of material things."[185] In a sense Aquinas established the *rationality* of *faith*, but perhaps he did not do this with sufficient emphasis and clarity to prevent subsequent corruption of his teachings.

> Through grace a more perfect knowledge of God is had than through the natural reason. For cognition through natural reason needs both images received from things of sense, and the natural light of intelligence, through whose virtue we abstract intelligible conceptions from them. In both respects human cognition is aided through the revelation of grace.

[184] Aquinas quoted in Taylor, *The Medieval Mind*; 477.
[185] *Ibid.*; 479.

> For the natural light of the intellect is strengthened through the infusion of light graciously given; while the images in the man's imagination are divinely formed so that they are expressive of things divine, rather than of what naturally is received through the senses.[186]

Aquinas wrestled with the concepts of the world's creation *ex nihilo*, with man's original perfection and his subsequent fall, and with the transmission of sin through the generations of the human race. It is somewhat hard to determine definitively whether Aquinas was a dichotomist (Body & Soul) or trichotomist (Body, Soul & Spirit) because his terminology is indiscriminate (but, unfortunately, so is the language of Scripture). As for the passing of sin from Adam through his descendants, Aquinas seems to cut the Gordian Knot between the *creationist view* (that each individual soul is created by God at the moment of procreative conception) and the *traducianist view* (that the soul is produced in the act of conception between a human man and woman). In the Thomistic solution to this problem, the Philosopher's anthropology comes to the fore, as Aquinas differentiates between two 'souls' in man: the 'sensative' soul, meaning basically the principle of life itself and of sense perception; and the 'intelligent' soul, meaning human reason and rationality. In Question CXVII of *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas posits two subsidiary and similar questions, responding to one in the affirmative and the other in the negative.

In the First Article of the section, Aquinas asks "Whether the Sensitive Soul is Transmitted with the Semen?" and in the Second Article the corresponding question, "Whether the Intelligent Soul is Produced from the Semen?" He defends the affirmative answer to the first question on the basis that man is essentially a material and physical being, and that the principle of animal life in such a being cannot have its origin from a supernatural source. Hence the sensitive soul *is* transmitted from the human father to the offspring. But on the same line of reasoning Aquinas denies the second proposition, arguing that the

[186] *Idem.*

intellectual soul is essentially spiritual and is therefore beyond the capability of a material to reproduce.

> It is impossible for an active power existing in matter to extend its action t the production of an immaterial effect. Now it is manifest that the intellectual principle in man transcends matter, for it has an operation in which the body takes no part whatever. It is therefore impossible for the seminal power to produce the intellectual principle.[187]

Here is Aquinas' *tertium quid*, man possessing a physical body and a sensitive soul, both received from his biological parents, and an intellectual soul received directly from God. One might argue that this intellectual component corresponds to the 'spirit' in other presentations of anthropology, but the result is still an amalgam of incompatible concepts within the unity of human nature. Furthermore, Aquinas' explanation of the source of each individual 'intellectual principle' fails to correspond with his view of the natural *concupiscence* (tendency toward sin) of every human being, derived at the very moment of conception. Thus his view suffers the same insuperable problem as that of the *creationist view* – how to explain the presence of sin (Original Sin) at the moment of conception without resorting to the pagan Greek notion that 'spirit' is corrupted by 'flesh.' In this section of Thomism we are again reminded that the only proper place to go to find out about the nature of man, is the revelation provided by the Maker of Man, and not to the vain philosophy of man himself.

Aquinas on the Sacraments:

We have seen in previous lessons how the institutional Church of the Middle Ages evolved into a *sacramental* Church, wherein divine grace was mediated by the priesthood through the sacraments. The importance of the Sacraments to the historical study of medieval theology cannot be overstated.

[187] Pegis; 1085.

"All lines of interest in medieval theology converge in the teaching concerning the Sacraments."[188] Doctrinal views on the sacraments – their number, justification, and efficacy – remained quite fluid until the time of Thomas Aquinas, and his analysis and defense of the *seven* sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church has remained the orthodox Catholic position from his day to the present. Thus it made sense to postpone a more thorough discussion on the Sacraments until it might correspond with this brief theological biography of Aquinas.

We must begin, however, with a summary statement concerning the *means of grace* within the Romish Church as they developed in Catholic teaching and practice across the centuries prior to Aquinas. He did not invent them; by his 13th Century they were already firmly entrenched in the life of Christendom.

The theological origin of the sacraments as means of grace is found in the Church's evolving view on Man's first estate, and on the concept of the Fall and of Original Sin. Theologians from the earliest centuries of the Church onward, and with increasing unanimity, taught that Adam was created morally perfect and was endowed with the 'super-added' characteristic of righteousness. It was this latter *donum superadditum* – this gracious added gift – that Mankind lost when Adam fell in sin. Furthermore, without this added gift of righteousness, Man was soon overcome by his animal nature – his *concupiscence* – and fell into actual sin. J. L. Neve provides an excellent summary of the basic hamartology (doctrine of sin) of the medieval Church by the time of Aquinas.

> The conditional original sin is materialized through actual sin. The chief sources for this are seven: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth…They again are subdivided into *peccata mortalia* and *venialia*. A sin is mortal if it is a willful transgression of the law of God, and it separates from God. Venial sins are only a…deviation from God without sufficient reflection or full consent of the will. They may be atoned for by temporal punishment.[189]

[188] Neve; 203.
[189] Neve; 202.

Two other medieval concepts must be added to the mix: the *Treasury of Merit* and *Purgatory*. The first, the *thesaurus supererogationis meritorum*, consists of the righteous acts of Christ and of the saints, and is posited on the concept that man may do good works above and beyond the necessity of his own sin, thus making 'deposits' of merit into the treasury. Thence "the treasury is at the disposal of the pope and administered by the priests for the benefit of the souls in purgatory."[190] This latter place – the region of purgation of remaining sins upon physical death – was an entirely accepted doctrine by Aquinas' time. The necessity of Purgatory arises from the almost universal soteriological error of the medieval theological system, whereby the principles of *justification* and *sanctification* were confused and combined. Very simply, yet accurately, Catholic theologians taught that a man was justified only insofar as he was sanctified. As it was evident that very, very few men ended their physical life fully sanctified (this was considered possible only for martyrs and exceedingly pious individuals), the necessity remained for further sanctification – and consequently justification – beyond the grave. In life the Church mitigated a person's posthumous debt through the Sacraments and through Indulgences; in death further progress could be made through the celebration of the Mass on behalf of a deceased loved one (or simply by prepaid masses by priests for those who feared that their loved ones might not be so loving as to pay themselves). A thorough-going mercantile exchange in 'atonement' grew up out of this insidious doctrinal error – with trafficking in indulgences reaching a fever pitch right before the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century. Undergirding all of this was the cradle-to-grave security system of the Sacraments.

Aquinas lent his considerable influence to the definition and defense of the Sacraments, and after him little more was added to the Roman doctrine. "The individual definitions of each sacrament, as contained in the papal bull

[190] *Ibid.*; 203.

Exultate Deo of 1439, are chiefly based on Thomas Aquinas and are on the whole still authoritative in the church of Rome."[191]

We have, however, reached (and perhaps exceeded) the Thomistic Saturation Point for most readers.[192] His teaching on the Sacraments in nonetheless the very summit of the peak of Medieval Theology, and offers a classic illustration of his combination of Aristotelian philosophy with Augustinian theology. In Thomistic thought the Sacraments become "Man's Path to God," and to that most desired of all human goals, the *Beatific Vision*. Thus we will end this lesson simply with a list of the seven Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, and investigate Aquinas' rational-theological development of them (D.V.) in the next lesson.

I. The Sacrament of Baptism
II. The Sacrament of Confirmation
III. The Sacrament of the Eucharist
IV. The Sacrament of Penance
V. The Sacrament of Extreme Unction
VI. The Sacrament of Holy Orders
VII. The Sacrament of Marriage

[191] *Ibid.*; 204.
[192] TSP is a recently discovered phenomenon (I just made it up) undoubtedly suffered innumerable times over the past 800 years by readers of Aquinas. Victims begin to display the common symptoms of glazed eyes and a dull headache after between one paragraph and one Article of Thomistic writings. Continued exposure to Thomism after the early symptoms usually renders the patient insensible and incoherent.

Session 10: **The Sacraments & Salvation**

Text Reading: **Colossians 2:16 - 23**

"They were to the medieval mind
the essential food of the religious life,
and, in building up the sacramental system,
the medieval theologian felt he was fortifying the very fabric of the Church"
(Philip Schaff)

In spite of the profound and lasting impact of Thomistic theology on the Catholic Church's doctrine of the Sacraments, Thomas Aquinas was hardly the inventor or discoverer of these 'means of grace.' Theologians had been defining, debating, and defending the sacraments – and chronically arguing over just how many there were – since the Apostolic Fathers. The pathway from the Early Church to the height of Scholasticism in the teachings of Aquinas traveled through many different theological way-stations, and not a few side-paths and dead-ends. It was Augustine who set the tone of the Church's discussion on the sacraments (though he did not attempt to set their number), when he defined a sacrament as "the visible sign of an invisible grace." Thus from Augustine in the 5th Century to Bonaventura in the 13th, a certain honored mystery attached to the observance of the various sacraments, a mystery that seems embodied in Scriptural passages like the following from the Apostle Paul,

> *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*
> (I Corinthians 10:16-17)

Paul's view of the sacramental mystery of God's interaction with His people seems to extend it back into the Old Covenant era as well,

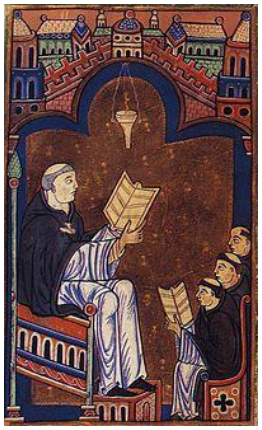
> *Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the*

> *sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*
>
> (I Corinthians 10:1-4)

This language is not the straightforward and non-allegorical 'memorial' view held by so much of modern Evangelicalism since the Reformation (especially among the Baptist wing of Protestantism). But the memorial view, indefensible from Scripture, is at least understandable when one considers the intrinsic power and centrality to faith that the sacraments came to hold by the Middle Ages. Philip Schaff writes, "As the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ were wrought out in the Nicene and post-Nicene periods, so the Schoolmen of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries wrought out the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments. At no point were the medieval theologians more industrious or did they put forth keener speculative force."[193] In Aquinas' day these 'means of grace' had already, in practical application within Christendom, moved well past the mere symbolical definition of Augustine, to become *vehicles* themselves of the grace they represented. The Pauline and Augustinian churches were *sacramental*, observing specifically ordained rituals with deference to the mysterious meaning they represented. The church of Aquinas was *sacerdotal*, with the sacraments becoming themselves the instruments of divine grace through which the Church dispensed saving and healing power *ex opera operato* – largely without regard to the heart of either the priest or the recipient. Little wonder that many believers during the Reformation recoiled so far from the falsehood that had grown up around the sacraments, that they passed over to the other side of the truth and reduced them to mere 'memorials.'

The architect of that medieval system that was to become so repugnant to the Reformers and their heirs was Thomas Aquinas. But the material with which he constructed the Roman Church's sacerdotal edifice was produced by an earlier medieval theologian, quite significant in his own right, **Hugo of St.**

[193] Schaff; 701.



Hugo of St. Victor (1096-1141)

Victor. Hugo was a mystic of the same cloth as Bernard of Clairvaux, and it may be for this reason that his influence with regard to the sacraments did not prove as lasting as that of the more rational Aquinas. But if Aquinas gave medieval sacerdotalism its voice, Hugo had already given it its soul. His treatise, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, is where we find the final word as to the number of sacraments – seven – and the mystical development of sacramentalism under all of the dispensations of God's grace to mankind.

The medieval scholastic mind – indeed the mind of Christendom itself – was absorbed in symbolism, and had fully imbibed the notion that God communicates to mankind primarily through symbols such as holy places and relics. Thus to a devout Churchman like Hugo of St. Victor, the sacraments of each era of what we would call redemptive history are powerful and grace-giving symbols necessary for man to attain salvation under that particular economy.

> When Hugo speaks of the 'sacraments' in the creation of light and the waters divided by the firmament, he means that in addition to their material nature as light and water, they are essentially symbols. Their symbolism is as veritably part of their nature as the symbolical character of the Eucharist is part of the nature of the consecrated bread and wine. The sacraments are among the deepest verities of the Christian Faith. And the same representative verity that exists in them, exists, in less perfected mode, throughout God's entire creation.[194]

Hugo adds to this symbolic view of Creation the medieval notion of the Fall as 'sickness' rather than the evangelical view of the Fall as spiritual death. Pervading the medieval writings with regard to the human condition, is the view that man is alienated from God through sin and is consequently sick and in need

[194] Taylor, Henry Osborn; *The Medieval Mind*; 95.

of medicine. The metaphor of medicine is, in fact, frequently used by all the Schoolmen, and this is particularly true of Hugo.

> As soon as man had fallen from his first state of incorruption, he began to be sick, in body through his mortality, in mind through his iniquity. Forthwith God prepared the medicine of his reparation through His sacraments. In divers times and places God presented these for man's healing, as reason and the cause demanded, some of them before the Law, some under the Law and some under grace. Though different in form they had the same effect and accomplished the one health. If any one inquires the period of their appointment he may know that as long as there is disease so long is the time of the medicine…When a sacrament has fulfilled its time it ceases, and others take its place, to bring about that same health.[195]

Because he believed that fallen man was sick and in need of divine medicine, Hugo had to believe that the symbolic medicine that was the sacrament could not merely *signify* the healing power, but had also to *contain* that healing power. Here is where Scholasticism parted company with Augustine, and the Sacraments derived their magical salvific powers. Hugo writes, "The sacrament is the corporeal or material element set out sensibly, representing from its similitude, signifying from its institution, and *containing from its sanctification*, some invisible and spiritual grace."[196]

The source of power contained in the sacraments was universally taught to flow from their connection to Jesus Christ, and particularly the Incarnation. That Incarnation was itself a supreme sacrament, in which the visible, sensible element – the physical, human body of Jesus – not only *represented* the very nature of God, but also *contained* that nature in bodily form. With this we can agree, but it does not follow that those mysterious rites ordained by the Lord also possess the very power for spiritual healing and salvation that they symbolize. And so the Medieval Church had to take one more step to make the connection between the sacrament and the Lord complete – at least in their theology.

[195] Hugo, quote by Taylor; 97.
[196] Quoted in Taylor; 98 (italics added).

This step was to embody the Incarnate Lord within the Church itself. The metaphorical reference in the New Testament to the Church being 'the Body of Christ,' was translated of necessity into 'incarnational theology,' in which the institutional church becomes the Incarnate Christ. Thus when the priest utters the words of consecration over the sacramental elements (water, wine, bread, etc.), these are literally and truly sanctified by the Lord and come to contain within them (in *substance* though not in *form*) the actual saving and healing grace they represent. This power also undergirds the medieval teaching that the sacrament performs its healing and saving purpose *ex opera operato*, meaning 'out of the work, works.' This is to say that the reception of the spiritual and gracious benefit from the sacrament did not depend on the sanctity of the priest, nor upon the faith of the recipient, but only on the power intrinsic within the sacrament through the words of consecration.

Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Sacraments:

All of this fit in neatly with Thomistic theology and the Aristotelian synthesis promulgated by Aquinas. As Aristotle emphasized the role of human sense perception in the acquisition of all knowledge, so Aquinas was able to justify the necessity of elemental sacraments to the spiritual healing of sinners.

> The need of Sacraments is founded by Aquinas on that peculiarity of our nature by which we are led up to spiritual and intelligible things by means of things corporeal and sensible, on the effect of sin in rendering us more subject to things material, and on the fact that our activity here has to do with corporeal existences.[197]

Entirely absent from this developing theology of the sacraments are the two evangelical doctrines of absolute spiritual depravity – that which the Apostle Paul speaks of as being *"dead in trespass and sin"* – and the doctrine of justification by faith. Medieval Roman Catholicism, which is essentially no different from

[197] Fisher, George Park; *History of Christian Doctrine*; 254.

Modern Roman Catholicism, is a mediatorial system whereby the 'medicine' of spiritual healing is administered by the hierarchy of the Church to the parishioner. Furthermore, it is *by means of* the sacraments that the member of the Roman Church maintains his or her membership inviolate; and "outside the Church there is no salvation." Cradle to grave security is comprised in the sacraments, beginning with Baptism administered to infants and ending with Extreme Unction given to those in their final illness. These alone do not save, however, for there remain the fires of Purgatory for the vast majority of Catholics. But the sacraments are the *sine qua non* – without which one cannot even hope for Purgatory, but is consigned to eternal damnation. All of this Thomas Aquinas firmly believed, and he bent his considerable intellectual, philosophical, and theological powers to the definition and defense of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church.

> The transcendant [*sic*] importance of the Sacraments in the Scholastic system is realized when we are told by Aquinas that it is by them, through the hierarchy who administer them, that we are made the recipients of that grace which renders us participants of the divine nature. At the root of his philosophy in its bearing on the subject is the idea of the mystical unity of the Church in one body, having Christ for its head. In some way – it is not explained exactly how – through the Sacraments the benefits of the passion of Christ are applied to men.[198]

Aquinas laid out his theological definition and justification for the seven Catholic sacraments in his apologetical treatise, *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In this document the language of sickness and healing is pervasive, echoing the common medieval strain that mankind's fall into sin did not constitute spiritual death and utter inability of remedy, but rather sickness and the need for a divine prescription. Thus in Aquinas' opening remarks on the sacraments, Chapter 56 of *Gentiles*, he explains the necessity of the sacraments is such terms.

[198] Fisher; 255.

> Since, however (as has already been said), the death of Christ is, so to say, the universal cause of human salvation, and since a universal cause must he applied singly to each of its effects, it was necessary to show men some remedies through which the benefit of Christ's death could somehow be conjoined to them. It is of this sort, of course, that the sacraments of the Church are said to be.[199]

In the very next paragraph he applies his Aristotelian philosophy that all human knowledge is mediated through the senses, by saying, "Now, remedies of this kind had to be handed on with some visible sign."[200]

> **First**, indeed, because just as He does for all other things, so also for man, God provides according to his condition. Now, man's condition is such that he is brought to grasp the spiritual and intelligible naturally through the senses. Therefore, spiritual remedies had to be given to men under sensible signs. **Second**, because instruments must be proportioned to their first cause. But the first and universal cause of human salvation is the incarnate Word, as is clear from the foregoing. Therefore, harmoniously the remedies by which the power of the universal cause reaches men had a likeness to that cause—, that is, the divine power operates in them under visible signs. **Third**, because man fell into sin by clinging unduly to visible things. Therefore, that one might not believe visible things evil of their nature, and that for this reason those clinging to them had sinned, it was fitting that through the visible things themselves the remedies of salvation be applied to men. Consequently, it would appear that visible things are good of their nature—as created by God—but they become damaging to men so far as one clings to them in a disordered way, and saving so far as one uses them in an ordered way.[201]

What Aquinas is saying here, in summary, is that God has conditioned the remedy for human sin in such a manner that man can apprehend the form of the medicine. What is left unanswered, however, is how man was supposed to comprehend the substance or essence of the remedy, especially in cases like the Eucharist, wherein the substance changes while the form remains the same. He fully accepts the doctrine of transubstantiation, and spends no time at all attempting to justify the number *seven* as the correct enumeration of the

[199] Aquinas, Thomas; *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Four;* 56:1.
[200] *Ibid*.; 56.2.
[201] *Ibid*.; 56.3-5.

sacraments. Rather, on both these points of medieval development to Christian doctrine and practice, Aquinas merely takes up where Hugo left off and assumes both questionable tenets as fact.

In describing the seven sacraments, Aquinas argues backwards from the established number of sacraments, to their individual meanings within this enumeration. Since it is the health of the sinner that is at issue (not his regeneration, *per se*, but his recovery of original wellness or righteousness), he allegorizes the sacraments according to his own view of the phases of a man's life: birth, growth, and nourishment. As with most Scholastic theologians, the number and identity of such categories is entirely convenient; there is no reason why the parallels might not be more than three, or less than three. But three works here for Aquinas,

> Thus, then, in the spiritual life, also, the first thing is **spiritual generation**: by *baptism*; the second is **spiritual growth** leading to perfect strength: by the sacrament of *confirmation*; the third is **spiritual nourishment**: by the sacrament of the *Eucharist*. A fourth remains, which is the **spiritual healing**; it takes place either in the soul alone through the sacrament of *penance*; or from the soul flows to the body when this is timely, through *extreme unction*. These, therefore, bear on those who are propagated and preserved in the spiritual life.[202]

This logic implies that even if man had not fallen into sin – in other words, had not contracted this illness of soul – the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist would still have been necessary. Furthermore, as he then develops his thinking on the *seven* sacraments, Aquinas brings up the important facet of the propagation of both the physical and the spiritual life. The sacrament corresponding to the first is *marriage*, and to the second, *holy orders*. One might indeed argue that the institution of marriage is both a sacrament and one that pertains to man even in his innocence, for it was before the Fall that God

[202] *Gentiles*; 58.4, bold and italics added for emphasis.

established the 'one flesh' union of marriage. Yet there is very little biblical justification for adding marriage to the list of sacraments of the Church.

Aquinas follows the party line on the importance of baptism as the sacrament of spiritual generation. This view is called 'Baptismal Regeneration,' and is fundamental to Roman Catholic soteriology and integral to quite a few Protestant denominations as well. Aquinas mixes his metaphors on this one, though, for he speaks of baptism under the allegory of *generation* or *birth*, but defends the use of water as the sensible sign on the basis of *washing*. Without trying to be facetious, it would have been more logical for Aquinas to liken the baptismal water to the amniotic fluid of the womb. The point shows that great inconsistencies arise when one is attempting to build a foundation of theological truth under an ecclesiastical structure already built.

Aquinas asserts that Baptism is a one time rite that must not be repeated, as birth is a one time event that cannot be repeated. Yet Baptism only cleanses from prior sins (as well as Original Sin), and renders the baptized person capable of receiving all further spiritual instruction and blessings. This explains why many members of both ancient and medieval society delayed baptism for as long as the felt safely convenient – in order that the greatest number of committed sins would be encompassed and forgiven by this one time sacrament. In addition, the 'fact' that Baptism only washes the stain and guilt from *past* sins, means that sins committed after Baptism are, as it were, on the person's own head. Thus the necessity of further sacramental medicines, as we shall soon see.

> Clearly, also, the infection which entered the world through Adam makes a man guilty but once. Hence, baptism, which is chiefly ordered against this infection, should not be repeated. There is also this common consideration: that, as long as a thing is once consecrated, it must not be consecrated again, so long as it endures, lest the consecration appear inefficacious. And so, since baptism is a kind of consecration of the one baptized, baptism must not be repeated.[203]

[203] *Gentiles*; 59.6.

Aquinas spends no time in *Gentiles* in discussing the proper candidates for Baptism, and accepts it as given that infants are to be baptized. But infants (or new converts, for that matter) are not spiritually mature enough to enter into the fullness of the spiritual life of the Church. As with some modern Protestant denominations, the Catholic Church did not view young converts or children to be the proper recipients of the Eucharist. There has to be an intermediate sacrament, that of *Confirmation*. The irony here is that the sacrament of the Eucharist is referred to by Aquinas as the nourishment of the spiritual life, whereas Baptism is the generation of that spiritual life. Thus, logically, many years may pass before the newborn spiritual life is permitted to eat any food!

> The perfection of spiritual strength consists properly in a man's daring to confess the faith of Christ in the presence of anyone at all, and in a man's being not withdrawn therefrom either by confusion or by terror, for strength drives out inordinate terror. Therefore, the sacrament by which spiritual strength is conferred on the one born again makes him in some sense a front-line fighter for the faith of Christ. And because fighters under a prince carry his insignia, they who receive the sacrament of confirmation are signed with the sign of Christ; this is the sign of the cross by which He fought and conquered. This sign they receive on the forehead as a sign that without a blush they publicly confess the faith of Christ.[204]

The most important sacrament to Aquinas, as it is the most important sacrament in the Roman Church, is the Eucharist or Mass. This is the spiritual food without which life would cease. Even more than that, this sacrament is the *actual* and not merely symbolic *union* of the believer with the Bread of Life Himself, Jesus Christ. In an almost 'cycle of life' allusion, Aquinas speaks of the actual body of Christ being taken into the body of the communicant with the effect that the life-power of Christ becomes the life-power of the communicant.

> Now, bodily life needs material nourishment, not only for increase in quantity, but to maintain the nature of the body as well, lest it be dissolved by continuous resolutions and lose its power; in the same way it was necessary to have spiritual

[204] *Gentiles*; 60.1.

> nourishment for the spiritual life that the reborn may both be conserved in virtues and grow in them…But consider this: He who begets is joined to the begotten in one way, and nourishment is joined to the nourished in another way in bodily things. For the one who begets need not be conjoined to the begotten in substance, but in likeness and in power only. But nutriment must be conjoined to the one nourished in substance. Wherefore, that the spiritual effects may answer the bodily signs, the mystery of the incarnate Word is joined to us in one way in baptism which is a spiritual rebirth, and in another way in this sacrament of the Eucharist which is a spiritual nourishment. In baptism the Word incarnate is contained in His power only, but we hold that in the sacrament of the Eucharist He is contained in His substance. [205]

Aquinas devotes the longest section of his defense of the Sacraments to the doctrine of *transubstantiation*. The logic is intricate and convoluted, and does not proceed from premise to conclusion, but rather from conclusion back to premises. The first and most critical of these premises is that transubstantiation is *the teaching of the Church*. Almost humorously, this caveat is added within a basic admission as to the irrationality and incomprehensibility of the doctrine of transubstantiation itself,

> Although, of course, the divine power operates with a greater sublimity and secrecy in this sacrament than a man's inquiry can search out, nonetheless, lest the teaching of the Church regarding this sacrament appear impossible to unbelievers, one must make the endeavor to exclude every impossibility.

In the midst of this part of his treatise, Aquinas acknowledges that the theory of transubstantiation violates his own philosophical under-pinnings, as what is taught by the Church in regard to the change in substances from the bread to the body, and the wine to the blood, *nature cannot do*. "For every operation of nature presupposes matter which individuates the substance; wherefore, nature cannot bring it about that this substance become that substance, that this finger, for example, become that finger."[206] Therefore Aquinas falls back on that tried-and-true defense used in religion when no other

[205] *Gentiles;* 61.1,3.
[206] *Ibid.*; 61.7.

plausible explanation can be found: God is omnipotent; He can do anything. "But matter is subject to the divine power, since the latter brings it into being. Hence, by divine power it can come about that this individual substance be converted into that pre-existing substance."[207] All must realize that this is not logical justification or definition, but rather an appeal to divine power to support Church doctrine. And all must realize that neither Thomas Aquinas, nor Roman Catholic theologians in general, are the only ones to do this.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is the last of the establishment sacraments – the ones that set the spiritual life in order and maintain it. Aquinas was enough of a realist, however, to know that even the regular observation of the Eucharist does not bring about sinless perfection any more than the regular attendance at meals prevents all forms of bodily illness. "Now, although grace is bestowed upon men by the aforesaid sacraments, they are not, for all that, rendered incapable of sin."[208] Indeed, this *concupiscence* or tendency to sin, will remain with man all of this days on the earth, right up to the point of death. Truly if the 'sickness' metaphor were considered in its fullest extent, and man's inner condition honestly assessed, Aquinas would have to have admitted that the spiritual life bestowed by Baptism, strengthened by Confirmation, and nourished by the Eucharist, is a very sickly and feeble thing, far worse than the physical condition of most men during their lives. If we add the common metaphor of the Church as an army (one that Aquinas himself employs often), then it is the case that the troops spend far more time in the infirmary than on the front lines.

So much spiritual sickness requires great quantities of medicine, regularly administered by the doctors of the Church, the priests. Therefore, to the three life-giving and life-regulating sacraments are added two restorative sacraments: Penance and Extreme (or Final) Unction. These sacraments are necessary "for

[207] *Idem.*
[208] *Ibid.*; 70.1.

man's assistance along the road to the end," writes Aquinas.[209] Here Aquinas adds ignorance to weakness as explanations as to why man's continues to sin even after the first three sacraments. He borrows from 'the Philosopher' in attempting to assign a rational component of sin that works alongside the volitional component.

> Furthermore, every sin comes about from a kind of ignorance. Thus, the Philosopher says that "every evil man is ignorant"; and we read in Proverbs (14:22): "They err that work evil." Therefore, then, a man can be secure from sin in the will, only when his intellect is secure from ignorance and from error. But, manifestly, a man is not rendered immune from every ignorance and error by the grace received in the sacraments; for such is a man whose intellect is beholding that truth which is the certitude of all truths; and this very beholding is the ultimate end of man, as was shown in Book III. It is not, then, by the grace of the sacraments that man is rendered impeccable.[210]

Thus we find man, even after his baptism, not only capable but prone to sin both willingly (employing his volition) and rationally (employing his intellect). The sacrament of Penance is therefore devised to provide the necessary medicinal remedy for this continued malady.

> From this, then, it is evident that if a man sins after baptism, he cannot have the remedy against his sin in baptism. And since the abundance of the divine mercy and the effectiveness of Christ's grace do not suffer him to be dismissed without a remedy, there was established another sacramental remedy by which sins are washed away. And this is the sacrament of penance, which is spiritual healing of a sort. For just as those who receive a natural life by generation can, if they incur some disease which is contrary to the perfection of life, be cured of their disease: not, indeed, so as to be born a second time, but healed by a kind of alteration; so baptism, which is a spiritual regeneration, is not given a second time against sins committed after baptism, but they are healed by penance which is a kind of spiritual alteration.[211]

Aquinas consistently maintains that it is Christ Jesus who is ultimately administering the prescription for health, or at least for the mitigation of the

[209] *Ibid.*; 70.3.
[210] *Ibid.*; 70.4; note that the word 'impeccable' means 'without sin.'
[211] *Ibid.*; 72.1.

illness. But this is done through the priest who stands in the place of Christ before the sinner, and since the priest is not omniscient (one wonders why Christ did not give the priesthood this gift), it is necessary that the sinner *confess* his sins to the priest in order for the priest to prescribe the appropriate penitential medicine. This is the Catholic practice and doctrine of *oracular confession*, more familiarly known as the confessional. The priest does not know the sin until he is told, but then he knows the proper penance to assign, and is also endowed with the spiritual authority of Christ Himself and pronounces *te absolve* – I absolve you – to the penitent sinner. This, according to Aquinas, is the very meaning of the 'keys' entrusted by the Lord to His apostles, and by them along the generational lines to the hierarchy of the Church.

> Since, however, to undergo punishment for a fault calls for a kind of judgment, the penitent who has committed himself to Christ for healing must look to Christ's judgment for fixing the punishment; and this, indeed, Christ does through His ministers, just as He does in the other sacraments. But no one can judge of faults which he does not know. It was necessary, then, that confession be instituted, the second part of this sacrament, so to say, in order to make the fault of the penitent known to the minister of Christ. This, according to Aquinas, is the very meaning of the 'keys' entrusted by the Lord to His apostles, and by them along the generational lines to the hierarchy of the Church. The minister, therefore, to whom confession is made must have judiciary power representing Christ, "who was appointed to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). For judiciary power two things are required: namely, the authority to know about the fault, and the power to absolve or condemn. And these two are called the "two keys of the Church," namely, the knowledge to discern and the power to bind and loose which our Lord committed to Peter as Matthew (16:19) has it: "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." He is not understood to have committed these to Peter so that he alone might have them, but so that they might through him be passed on to others; otherwise, sufficient provision for the salvation of the faithful would not have been made.[212]

But even the strong medicinal value of Penance is not sufficient to restore true health to the sinner, for in spite of the confessional and the exercise of the keys by the priest, he continues in sin to the point of death. This chronic illness

[212] *Ibid.*; 72.9-10.

is, of course, ultimately terminal. And when the congregant comes to that last illness, the very presence of bodily sickness serves as proof that his soul is not prepared to receive glory in the afterlife. Arguing from the passage on anointing the sick, found in James Chapter 5, Aquinas defines and defends the sacrament of Extreme Unction as necessary to prepare a man's passage from this life to the next.

> But, since man, whether due to negligence, or to the changing occupations of life, or even to the shortness of time, or to something else of the sort, does not perfectly heal within himself the weaknesses mentioned, a healthful provision for him is made by this sacrament: it completes the healing aforesaid, and it delivers him from the guilt of temporal punishment; as a result, nothing remains in him when the soul leaves the body which can obstruct the soul in the perception of glory. And therefore James adds: "And the Lord shall raise him up." Perhaps, also, a man has neither awareness nor memory of all the sins which he has committed, so that they may be washed away individual by penance. There are also those daily sins without which one does not lead this present life. And from these a man ought to be cleansed at his departure by this sacrament, so that nothing be found in him which would clash with the perception of glory. And therefore James adds: "If he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him."[213]

Thus far we have attained the cradle-to-grave security of the sacramental system, though even this is not enough to deliver the soul from Purgatory. Still, sacerdotalism gave great comfort to the superstitious and the pious alike: an almost mechanical apparatus that bore the sinner from the corruption of conception to the payday of sin, death. But there needed to be an engine by and through which this apparatus worked, and that was the priesthood and hierarchy of the Catholic Church. This need leads us to the unusual sacrament of Holy Orders, or Ordination, unusual in that it does not apply to all who are in the Church, but only to the sacramental ministers.

> It is, of course, clear from what has been said that in all the sacraments dealt with a spiritual grace is conferred in a mystery of visible things. But every action

[213] *Ibid.*; 73.2.

> ought to be proportioned to its agent. Therefore, the sacraments mentioned must be dispensed by visible men who have spiritual power. For angels are not competent to dispense the sacraments; this belongs to men clothed in visible flesh. Hence, the Apostle says: "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God" (Heb. 5:1).[214]

Holy Orders is one of three sacraments that bestow an *indelible* character upon the recipient, the other two being Baptism and Confirmation. This means that, not only are these sacraments to be given once and only once, their effect is permanent; it cannot be erased. These three 'stamp upon the soul a certain 'indelible character,' but the precise nature of this effect of grace it was found to be not easy to make clear."[215] Schaff adds, "Their mark cannot be effaced nor can they be repeated."[216] This characteristic of Holy Orders underlies the medieval and modern problem of priests who commit grievous sins, for it has not only been the case in our day that great offenses have arisen within the Roman Catholic priesthood.

We must remember that the sacraments, as taught by medieval theologians and supremely by Thomas Aquinas, effectuate their power *ex opera operato*. Again, this means that the gracious power of the sacrament is *in the sacrament* itself and not in the one who administers or the one who receives it. Hence Aquinas titles Chapter 77 of Book Four of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, "That the Sacraments can be Dispensed by Evil Ministers." Fundamentally, the reason why the modern Roman Catholic Church does not seem to know what to do with priests guilty of pedophilia, is that they believe the power given to the priest through the sacrament of Holy Orders cannot be eradicates, *even by sin*. Aquinas defends this point of view in no uncertain terms,

> From what we have Premised it is clear that the ministers of the Church, when they receive their orders, receive a certain power for dispensing the sacraments.

[214] *Gentiles*; 74.1.
[215] Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrines*; 255.
[216] Schaff; 707.

> But what is acquired by a thing through consecration persists in that thing forever; hence, nothing consecrated is consecrated a second time. Therefore, the power of their orders persists in the ministers of the Church perpetually. Therefore, it is not taken away by sin. Therefore, even sinners and evil men, provided they have orders, are able to confer the sacraments of the Church.[217]

We come finally to the seventh and last Sacrament, that of Marriage. This is a tough one, to be sure, and was not always included in the lists of sacraments throughout the Middle Ages. Part of the problem was, of course, the general view which prevailed that physical intercourse was itself sinful. How can the Church have a sacrament that pertains to what is *by nature* an evil act? Aquinas did not hold this view, for his Aristotelian concept of 'nature' was unsullied by sin, and he acknowledged that coital procreation is *natural* for man and not *sinful*. Yet it is also clear from Scripture that promiscuity is sinful and destructive of both the individual sinner and the corporate society. Thus it is necessary for the Church to establish a sacrament to sanctify human intercourse, and to set it within its proper channel, that of marriage.

> Now, we grant that by the sacraments men are restored to grace; nonetheless, they are not immediately restored to immortality. We have given the reason for this. But things which are corruptible cannot be perpetuated except by generation. Since, then, the people of the faithful had to be perpetuated unto the end of the world, this had to be done by generation, by which, also, the human species is perpetuated.[218]

However, it does not appear that Aquinas held any purpose for marriage other than procreation and education: the continuation of the Church through birth, and the education of such children into the life and sacraments of the Church. "Matrimony, then, in that it consists of the union of a husband and wife

[217] *Gentiles*; 77.1-2.
[218] *Ibid*.; 78.1.

purposing to generate and educate offspring for the worship of God, is a sacrament of the Church."[219]

Aquinas employs the literal meaning of the Latin *sacramentum* – 'mystery' – along with the central passage on marriage within the New Testament, Ephesians 5, to solidify his conclusion that Marriage is truly and rightfully a sacrament of the Church. "And as in the other sacraments by the thing done outwardly a sign is made of a spiritual thing, so, too, in this sacrament by the union of husband and wife a sign of the union of Christ and the Church is made; in the Apostle's words: 'This is a great sacrament, but I speak in Christ and in the church' (Eph. 5:32)."[220] But the representation of marriage as symbolic of the union between Christ and the Church necessitates, at least to Aquinas, the indissolubility of the marriage bond. This view undergirds the Catholic Church's abhorrence, and even denial, of divorce.

> Since, then, the union of husband and wife gives a sign of the union of Christ and the Church, that which makes the sign must correspond to that whose sign it is. Now, the union of Christ and the Church is a union of one to one to be held forever. ..Necessarily, then, matrimony as a sacrament of the Church is a union of one man to one woman to be held indivisibly, and this is included in the faithfulness by which the man and wife are bound to one another.[221]

Thus, even though the sacrament of Marriage does not convey an indelible character upon its participants, nonetheless it does bring about an essentially indelible situation between the husband and wife. Because of this feature of the sacrament, marriages within Roman Catholicism cannot be dissolved, they may only be annulled – judicially rendered as if they never happened. One more example of how the establishment of unbiblical 'means of grace' occasions ecclesiastical 'means of sin.'

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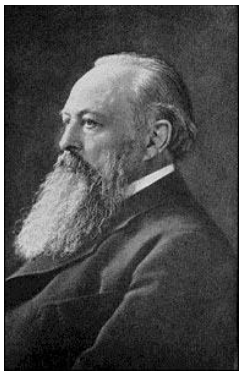
[219] *Ibid.*; 78.2.
[220] *Ibid.*; 78.3.
[221] *Ibid.*; 78.5.

Session 11: **Police State – The Inquisition**

Text Reading: **Acts 5:17 - 29**

"The increase in heresy was in direct proportion
to the increased power of the Church,
which reached its zenith during the pontificate of Innocent III."
(Edward Burman, *The Inquisition*)

"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." This famous dictum from the pen of John Dahlberg-Acton, the 1st Baron Acton, was written in response to the supposition that popes and kings ought to be judged by a different (and more lenient) standard than other men. Acton heartily disagreed, arguing that it was the very nature of power accumulated by powerful men that both stimulated and aggravated their crimes. He saw a proportional relationship, perhaps even an exponential one, between the acquisition of power and the tendency to corruption and oppression. Lord Acton's comments are perhaps even more cogent when one considers that his religion was Roman Catholicism.



Lord Acton (1834-1902)

> But if we might discuss this point until we found that we nearly agreed, and if we do agree thoroughly about the impropriety of Carlylese denunciations and Pharisaism in history, I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favourable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way, against the holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it. That is the point at which the negation of Catholicism and the negation of Liberalism meet and keep high festival, and the end learns to justify the means. You would hang a man of no position like Ravaillac; but if what one hears is true, then Elizabeth asked the gaoler to murder

> Mary, and William III. ordered his Scots minister to extirpate a clan. Here are the greatest names coupled with the greatest crimes; you would spare those criminals, for some mysterious reason. I would hang them higher than Haman, for reasons of quite obvious justice, still more, still higher for the sake of historical science.[222]

The events of the 13th and 14th Centuries must be viewed under the lens of Acton's thesis, for it was an era of the greatest papal power and reach and also an era of widespread and pervasive heresy against both the teachings and the hierarchy of the Church. Edward Burman, author of *The Inquisition: Hammer of Heresy*, seems to begin his treatise with a similar algorithm as that of Lord Acton, "The increase in heresy was in direct proportion to the increased power of the Church, which reached its zenith during the pontificate of Innocent III."[223] At first glance it may appear that the increased effectiveness of the Papal Curia in effecting its will across greater expanses of Western Europe was the cause for the increase in prosecutions, and executions, of heretics. And it is true that some of the groups proscribed and persecuted by the Catholic hierarchy were indeed heretical – one in particular, the Cathari or Albigenses, was not even Christian.

But there is another possible rationale for the increased attention to heretical teaching and preaching, the need for power to consolidate itself. As papal influence and prestige increased, with its corresponding impact on the political life of Western Europe, there arose the 'felt need' – both political and religious – to bring about uniformity in doctrine and practice. It is the way with all religions that 'come into power,' and is the fundamental reason why the Framers of the American Constitution went to such lengths to prohibit the government establishment of any religion in the fledgling United States. Absolute power cannot brook dissent, and throughout the annals of time such power has inevitably formed itself into a Police State.

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[222] Dahlberg-Acton, John (1st Baron Acton) in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887.
[223] Burman, Edward *The Inquisition: Hammer of Heresy* (New York: Dorset Press; 1984); 17.

That is what Europe became for over three centuries, from the reign of Innocent at the end of the 12th Century, to the dawn of the Reformation in the opening decades of the 15th. Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of men, women, and children were accused, arrested, imprisoned, 'tried,' exiled, punished, or executed as heretics.[224] Bishop Creighton would excuse the excesses of Innocent III and his successors as due to the stresses of power, and the pragmatic concerns of keeping the ship of state (or of church) sailing on an even keel. Lord Acton would be far closer to the truth: the persecutions of this era were a wanton misuse of power, and the perpetrators indeed deserve higher gallows than Haman.

Burman does not go as far as Creighton; he does not justify the accusations and arrests, the lengthy imprisonments, mock trials, and executions by fire. Nonetheless he approaches Creighton's view when he frequently compares the treatment of 'heretics' by the medieval Church with the corresponding treatment of political prisoners and criminals by the medieval State. He comments that the inquisitorial prisons were better than those of the king; the number of people executed by the Inquisition was a lower percentage of the total arrested than corresponding statistics for the various nations in Europe; the thoroughness of investigation by the inquisitors was far more meticulous than that of government prosecutors. In essence, Burman justifies the Inquisition as being 'not as bad' as the prevailing violent culture of the Middle Ages. Yet once again Lord Acton's paradigm holds true: the crimes against humanity committed in the name of the Prince of Peace cannot be mitigated by the fact – if indeed it is fact – that the conditions of oppression were *relatively* comfortable vis-à-vis similar miscarriages of justice committed in the name of a secular king. What remains astonishing to the modern reader of Church History

[224] 'Tried' is placed in quotes simply because the concept of 'innocent until proven guilty' did not exist in medieval Europe. The very fact of arrest presumed guilt, and very few were able to exonerate themselves through legal defense.

is that so few professing Christians of that era could comprehend the anomaly of a Church-run Police State.

Still, there is a certain logic by which the Inquisition follows upon Christendom as the natural effect of a sufficient cause. We cannot lay the blame entirely at Rome's feet, for the Pope never possessed sufficient arms to enforce his will against a reluctant Europe. Early attempts at squelching heresy failed in England in the 12th Century, for instance, due to the fact that King Henry II would not allow his subjects to be tried without jury, nor did the king allow the penalty of execution for the crime of heresy. Though the pope at that time, Alexander III, was a relatively strong pontiff he could no enforce his will upon the King of England. All this to say that the Inquisition would not have spread as it did unless it corresponded to a general attitude in Western Europe, that the eradication of heresy and heretics was a good to be sought by any and all means.

Fear of the devil, the Jew, and the Muslim all contributed to an intense desire for a stable and predictable society in Europe. The world was not democratic, and free-thinking was not a luxury possessed by any member of society below the king. Paul Johnson describes the situation clearly, "Because the Christian society was total it had to be compulsory; and because it was compulsory it had no alternative but to declare war on its dissentients."[225] There were rare occasions here and there when the village or town reacted against the Inquisition, and even a couple of instances when the inquisitor was murdered. But on the whole it was an acceptable and accepted tyranny; the price that had to be paid for 'peace and safety' within Christendom. "Thus hateful devices like the Inquisition, or the crusade against 'heretics' – were seen by many – not just the rich, but anyone who liked stability – as indispensible defences [*sic*] against social breakdown and mass terrorism."[226]

[225] Johnson; 258.
[226] *Ibid.*; 257.

The Beginnings of the Inquisition:

Uniformity is an impossible goal, even in a tightly woven and controlled society such as medieval Europe. From a religious standpoint, devotion was encouraged and even demanded from the populace, but such devotion occasionally led to fervor, and thence to fanaticism. The Church tried to control and channel 'excessive' religious devotion into acceptable and safe venues such as the monasteries and the Crusades. But the Crusades themselves introduced Western European Christians to strange people and strange ideas, and consequently reintroduced many of the Gnostic errors from the Church's early history back into Western Christendom when these Crusaders returned home. Migration and trade contributed to the exchange of unorthodox ideas, and the proximity of Muslims and Jews with Christians in Spain had the same effect.

Innocent III recognized the danger of spreading disaffection among the people with the clergy and hierarchy of the Catholic Church, but he did not immediately resort to violent means to control it. Although the Franciscans and Dominicans owe their establishment largely to their respective founders, Francis and Dominic, the timing of their official recognition by Rome corresponded with the Church's need for a means of combating the advance of heresy. Innocent III and his successor Honorius III, counted on these two new mendicant orders to preach sound Catholic doctrine to those who had succumbed to the piety and vigor of the various 'heretical' sects. The poverty of the Franciscans and the devotion of the Dominicans did have some effect to this end, but it was far too little to stem the tide. The task was greater than could be achieved by preaching alone, for the preaching orders were not merely trying to convince wayward Christians to come back to the Catholic Church, they were also battling against the established laxity and corruption of the Catholic clergy and hierarchy. As most of the 'heretics' were illiterate, it is likely that they were offended more by the immoral and avaricious behavior of the priests than by the doctrines of the Church itself.

Thus the majority of the men and women who followed after the heretical teachers and preachers of the Middle Ages probably did so because they admired the piety of these leaders' lives, enjoyed the tirades that were launched against the improprieties of the Catholic hierarchy, and were stimulated by the spiritualism that accompanied such movements.[227] These 'heretical' developments followed two primary paths; one a revitalization of the ancient Gnostic error from the Early Church, and the other a vague forerunner of the Protestant Reformation itself.

> By 1200, two years after Innocent became Pope, there were two principal heretical traditions, which were to become the targets of the Inquisition in the first phase of its existence. The first, and most dangerous from the Church's point of view, was the dualism of the Cathars; the second, which the Inquisition never succeeded in exterminating and which survives to this day, was that of the Waldensians, or 'poor men of Lyons.'[228]

Innocent III was not the instigator of the Inquisition, nor was his immediate successor, Honorius III. Burman grants the honor of origination to the next pope in line, Gregory IX, who reigned from 1227 to 1233.[229] What occurred within the papacy of Gregory IX was the application of the growing importance of *law* and *legal remedy* to the problem of heresy. The Papal Curia had for a long time been evolving into a legal court, and during Innocent's pontificate Rome became the court of last appeal for all manner of claims throughout Christendom, superseding both royal and Episcopal courts. In addition, the writing and systematizing of canon law became the primary task of clerics working for the Pope and the Curia, and many universities were founded first and foremost for the instruction of law. Gregory IX was most certainly cut from this legal cloth.

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[227] There are interesting similarities between the anti-clerical sectarian movements of the Middle Ages and the more modern charismatic movement within Western Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic.
[228] Burman; 18.
[229] *Ibid.*; 31.

> He was himself an intellectual and canonist like his uncle Innocent III, who had created him Cardinal in 1198 and assigned him a series of important tasks. Gregory was pervaded by the new spirit which the Mendicant Orders had introduced into the Church, having been a personal friend of both St. Dominic and St. Francis.[230]

Gregory IX therefore set out to construct a legal entity that would investigate, accuse, prosecute, and judge heretics in a uniform manner across the whole of Europe. The work of the Papal Inquisition was commenced, and it was turned over to the Franciscans and Dominicans for vigorous prosecution. Gregory and his successors granted almost unlimited authority to the newly created order of inquisitors, and these traveled from town to town throughout much of Europe under the authority of the Vicar of Christ, waging carnal war against the enemies of the Catholic Church. "Once the Inquisition moved into an area, the bishop's prison was soon full; then the king's; then old buildings had to be converted, or new ones built."[231] The first target of the Inquisition was the Cathari.

Cathari:

Burman notes that "in a sense the Cathars were not Christian heretics at all, since they denied the fundamental tenet of Christianity: they did not believe in a single God, but in a good God who had created the immaterial world and an evil God who had created the material world."[232] The Cathari were dualists, as were the Gnostics against whom the Apostle John wrote and whose dualistic teachings influenced and corrupted the Post-Apostolic Church. But Burman's comment does not follow – that the Cathari were not 'Christian heretics' at all – because it fails to recognize the ecclesiastical and political reality of *Christendom* in the Middle Ages. The Cathari *were Christians* because they were born in

[230] Burman; 32.
[231] Johnson; 255.
[232] Burman; 18.

Europe, to Christian parents within a Catholic diocese, having been baptized by the local Catholic priest. Thus they were *ipso facto* heretics in that they had embraced false teachings with regard to deity, and had set themselves against the Catholic hierarchy and its claim to be the only true Church.

One of the problems in studying the Cathari is the fact that they were not called by that name everywhere they existed. "'Cathar' was first applied to heretics in northern Europe about 1160. They were also call Publicans, Paterines (in Italy), Bougres or Bulgars in France, or Arians, Manichaeans or Marcionites. A round Albi the Cathars were termed Albigensians."[233] Yet the common denominator of the various groups within the sect was dualism, the belief in two gods and the corresponding denial of the Trinity and deity of Christ. Still, the Cathari had a church, a priesthood, and a pope who resided in Bulgaria; the movement was, in a sense, a mirror of the Catholic Church. "They aimed to substitute a perfect elite for the corrupt clergy."[234] Kurtz adds, "The common characteristic of these sects was opposition to the clergy and the hierarchy."[235] This aspect of the sect certainly did not endear the Cathari, by whatever name they were known, to the priests, bishops, or popes of their time.

Innocent III was the first to attempt the eradication of the Cathari, and he did so through such means as to prove that he was not averse to the use of violence against heresy. History knows this effort as the Albigensian Crusade, and it was as much of a Crusade – with all of the temporal protections and eternal blessings – as the military excursions to Palestine. In Innocent's day thelargest and most active concentration of the Cathari was in southern France, particularly the province of Toulouse near the town of Albi. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse was quite tolerant of the sect and permitted it to

Raymond VI (1156-1222)

[233] Johnson; 251.
[234] *Idem.*
[235] Kurtz, *History of the Christian Church*; 434.

flourish in his territory. Raymond's attitude was not uncommon among the nobility, who tended to value the temporal
benefits of having good, hard-working citizens without paying too close attention to their religious idiosyncrasies. But the Pope was not so tolerant, and had no intention of allowing the temporal ruler of the province permit the propagation of heretics. Innocent dispatched his legate, Pierre de Castelnau, to order Raymond to use physical force to eradicate the Cathari (Albigenses) in his territory. Raymond resisted the papal legate manfully and apparently Raymond's view was heartily shared by his subordinates, for Pierre was assassinated. As a result, although nothing directly implicated the Count, he was nonetheless excommunicated by Innocent III, and was only restored after a humiliating obeisance to the Pope.

Raymond's territory was one of the most fertile and prosperous in France, so it did not take Innocent long to enlist other members of the nobility to prosecute his crusade against the Albigensians of Toulouse. These Christian warriors were as motivated, if not more, by the prospect of securing for themselves some or all of Raymond's territory as they were by any religious fervor against the heretics. Nonetheless they prosecuted their duties with vigor and massacred thousands upon thousands of Albigensians, and undoubtedly not a few 'good Catholics' as well. Raymond tried to stop the slaughter and to secure his own rights within his ancestral province, but this simply got him excommunicated again and sent into exile.

The commander-general of the Albigensian Crusade was Simon de Montfort the Elder, a veteran of the Fourth Crusade (the one that sacked Constantinople, though de Montfort did not participate in that farce). The crusaders first subdued the city of Béziers, which had a large population of Cathari within its walls, and subsequently slaughtered over 20,000 men, women, and children. The crusaders were exonerated of this horrible crime against humanity with the words, origin unknown, "*Kill them all, God will know His*

own."[236] De Montfort continued his rampage through the former lands of Count Raymond, excited by the prospect of adding them to his already substantial domains. He venture was cut short, however, when his head was crushed from the stone of a defensive mangonel during the crusader's siege of the city of Toulouse. Raymond has secretly returned to his capitol city and was leading the defense at the time; he was eventually able regain his hereditary lands, but only on the condition that they revert to the king of France should Raymond's line lack a male heir. The Crusade itself continued in fits and starts until the middle of the 13th Century; there are no accurate accounts of how many perished.

But the Albigensian Crusade did not eradicate the Cathari, though it definitely diminished both their numbers and their influence. Still, pockets of Gnostic heresy existed throughout Europe, and their mere existence was problematic and dangerous for the established Church. Gregory IX thus began to employ the Church's vast legal infrastructure to the specific purpose of investigating, accusing, prosecuting, and condemning as many heretics as could be found in the expanse of Europe. The irony of this era of imprisonment, exile, and death was the remarkable thoroughness with which it was done: detailed records were kept of all facts, all testimonies, all responses and defenses given, and all verdicts until such a comprehensive database was developed as had never before existed in any society of men. Even the Nazis grew careless with their record-keeping as the number of their victims grew to an unwieldy amount; but not so the inquisitors of Rome.

The process began in a manner commensurate with the lawyerly background of the Inquisition: with legal treatises and instruction manuals. Gregory started the process with a papal constitution entitled *Excommunicamus*, in which he set forth the scope of investigation and the range of punishments. Heretics, a very broadly interpreted category that included both Cathari and Waldensians, were not the only individuals brought under suspicion and the

[236] Tuez les tous, Dieu reconnaitra les siens.

threat of condemnation. Gregory stipulated "the excommunication of all Cathars, Waldensians, other heretics, and their defenders, followers, friends, and even those who do not denounce heretics they might know to the authorities."[237]

The range of punishments does show that the death penalty was not the only option for those convicted of heresy (in fact, by most accounts, fewer than 10% of those accused and tried through the age of Inquisition were executed). Still, from the sensibilities of the 21st Century, Gregory's instructions with regard to punishment cannot but disturb. He established,

1. Life imprisonment for impenitent heretics,
2. The right to appeal was denied,
3. Suspected heretics could not be defended by lawyers,
4. Children of heretics were to be excluded from ecclesiastical appointments to the second generation,
5. Deceased heretics were to be exhumed, their bones burned and their ashes scattered,
6. The homes of convicted heretics were to be demolished.

In the work of the Inquisition the Dominicans proved more adept, enthusiastic, and thorough than the Franciscans, and this was no where more evident than in the life and career of one of the most famous of medieval inquisitors, the Dominican friar **Bernard Gui** (1262-1331). Only Tomás de Torquemada of the Spanish Inquisition is more generally known than Gui.[238] Gui was a prolific writer on numerous subjects, but his most famous and influential work was titled *Conduct of the Inquisition into Heretical Wickedness*.[239] This treatise became the 'hunting manual' for inquisitors throughout Europe, as it described in minute detail the characteristics of certain groups deemed heretical by Rome, and prescribed the methods to be used for gathering information on a suspect, submitting the accusation, handling the prosecution and securing the conviction.

[237] Burman; 33.
[238] Gui factors as an antagonist in several famous novels including Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco.
[239] *Practica Inquisitionis Heretice Pravitatis*

A few selections from Gui's manual will give an adequate sense of the methodology employed to identify 'heretics.'

> Again, **ask** if he has heard it claimed among beguins that bishops, monks, friars or clerics who have superfluous or excessively valuable clothing violated Christ's gospel and follow the command of Antichrist or are of his family; or that Christ's poverty singularly shines forth in the ragged clothing of poor beguins. Again, **ask** if he has heard it claimed among beguins that in the modern time the church of God and faith of Christ has remained only in the humble community of poor beguins of the third order, and in other humble people who do not persecute these poor beguins or the evangelical rule of poverty. Again, **ask** if they have heard it said among beguins that it is of greater perfection for beguins to live by begging than by working, or by the labor of their hands, and that the pope cannot inhibit them from doing so or, by a sentence of excommunication, compel them not to beg in public if they can live decently by the labor of their hands, since they do not labor in preaching the gospel, for it is not fitting for them to preach.[240]

The procedure maintains the legal fiction of being an 'inquisition' – an *asking of questions* ostensibly to determine that a person is not, in fact, a heretic. But this seemingly innocuous method is betrayed by the fact that the individuals chosen for such questioning are only those who have already been denounced by others and, as the accused was never told either the identity of his accuser or the nature of charge, the victim was almost inevitably guilty without a chance of proving himself innocent. "The purpose of interrogation was not so much to prove the suspect's guilt as to obtain a confession, after which appropriate penance could be assigned."[241] In the following excerpt a man can be condemned merely for taking *Saint* Francis at his word with regard to the centrality of poverty to the true Christian life.

> Again, **ask** if he has heard it read or exposited that the sixth period, begun in the time of Saint Francis, will more perfectly observe the evangelical rule of poverty and the counsel of patience than any other preceding period. Again, **ask** if he has

[240] Internet History Sourcebook; http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/bernardgui-inq.asp
[241] Burman; 150.

> heard it exposited that the rule of Saint Francis is truly and precisely that evangelical life which Christ observed himself and imposed on his apostles, and that the pope has no power over it. Again, **ask** if he has heard it exposited that the rule of Saint Francis must be wickedly attacked and condemned by the proud, carnal church, just as Christ was condemned by the Jewish synagogue. Again, **ask** if he has heard it said or exposited in the aforesaid commentary that the blessed Francis was, after Christ and his mother, the greatest observer of the evangelical life and rule; that he was, under Christ, the original and principal founder, initiator and exemplifier of the sixth period of the church and of the evangelical rule; that the state or rule of Saint Francis will, like Christ, be crucified around the end of the sixth period; that Blessed Francis will then bodily rise again in glory so that, just as he was assimilated to Christ in a singular way both in his life and in being given the stigmata of the cross, so he will be assimilated to Christ by a bodily resurrection.[242]

The accused is, indeed, offered the hope of reconciliation with the Church, but only if he speaks the 'whole truth' – which essentially meant admitting to all charges leveled against him – and agreeing to denounce all accomplices and any others who might be suspect. Again, from Gui's manual:

> We, the inquisitor So-and-So, by the apostolic authority we bear by virtue of the office of inquisition concerning heretical depravity, order and admonish once, twice and thrice according to legal form, that you, so-and-so from such-and-such-a-place, swear simply and precisely to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth about yourself and your accomplices regarding the errors and erroneous opinions of the beguins of the third order, and regarding certain other things touching the faith and relevant to the office of the inquisitor of heretical depravity; again, that you humbly request the benefit of absolution from the sentence of excommunication laid on you by us in writing, which you have incurred which binds you still; and that you return unity with the church, acknowledge your error and abjure all heresy in our presence, so that, having sworn to observe the mandates of the church and our demands, you may deserve to be reconciled with the unity of the church. And we cite you to appear and do all this on the third day from this present one, assigning you the first day as a first term, the second as a second, and the third as the third and last. After that point you will respond concerning the faith and those things of which you are suspected, denounced, accused, telling the whole truth in judicial process about whatever you have done or know others to have done against the faith.

[242] Internet History Sourcebook; http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/bernardgui-inq.asp.

> Otherwise, if you have failed by completorium of that day to do each and every one of the aforementioned things, all of which you are legally required to do, by the apostolic authority held by us through the office of inquisition, we lay on you the bond of excommunication as one contumacious in matters of faith, because you are evasive and contemptuously refuse to be obedient in these things, and we declare to you that, if you pertinaciously endure this excommunication for a year, we will proceed against you as a heretic. And we offer to you a copy of the excommunication now be placed upon you, should you wish to have it and request it from us. This sentence was given in such-a-year, on such-a- day, and in such-a-place, with the following people present, etc.[243]

Should the accused be released unto his own recognizance or exiled under excommunication for the prescribed year, there was little opportunity of fleeing 'the law' and escaping further prosecution. This is because the Inquisition, administered by skilled lawyers and ecclesiastical clerics, assembled the most comprehensive database imaginable. There are examples in the extant records of exiled or excommunicated heretics coming under the Inquisition many years later, under false names and completely different circumstances, only to be discovered as one who was tried and condemned years before. Relapse into heresy almost always received the death penalty.

But herein lies another, and perhaps the most profound, hypocrisy of the Inquisition. The Church's official policy was (and remains to this day) opposed to capital punishment, and the Roman Catholic Church denied any and all implication of itself in the executions of convicted heretics during this reign of terror. This was done through the 'relaxation' of the Church's prohibition against the use of capital punishment by the State, which of course was followed by the turning over of the convicted heretic to the State for requisite punishment. The magistrate could hardly do otherwise than commit the 'heretic' to the flames, for any leniency would be interpreted as support and would itself be punishable by the Inquisition. Burman provides a table of punishments meted out in a particular locality during the later history of the Inquisition, remarkable

[243] *Idem.*

for two categories of punishment stunning in their employment of ambiguity: *relaxation in person* and *relaxation in effigy*. 'Relaxation' here means 'death by burning.'

Waldensians:

Statue of Peter Waldo at Luther Memorial in Worms

Peter Waldo (*c.* 1140 – *c.* 1218) was a wealthy merchant from Lyons who was greatly disturbed by the sudden death of a close companion and by a powerful sermon delivered by an itinerant monk on the evils of wealth and the blessedness of poverty. Waldo thereupon sold his possessions, divided a share to his children and established his wife securely in a convent, and took to the highways as a lay preacher. His vigor drew many to his cause, and the assemblage became known as the "Poor Men of Lyons." Apart for the lack of holy orders, Waldo's story is not unlike that of Francis of Assisi, who was a younger contemporary. Waldo's disciples of the second and third generation became known as the Waldensians and, in many respects, they were the forerunners of the Protestant Reformation.

This germ of reformation in Peter Waldo was evident in his devotion to Scripture as his final guide and authority for belief and practice. Uneducated in Latin, he employed two priests to translate large sections of the Bible into his native language and then proceeded to read and memorize these passages that they might govern his conduct. For instance, his disciples traveled in pairs, in imitation of the Lord's instructions to the Seventy. He enjoined poverty and piety on his followers, who themselves became a veritable army of lay preachers that drew thousands to their reform movement by virtue of their homely sermons and their evident piety. Waldo and his followers were not, however, *evangelical* in the reformed sense of the word, for in his writings there is no evidence of an understanding of, or even knowledge of, the doctrine of

justification by faith alone. Like many of his contemporaries, Waldo's reforms were aimed at the laxity and corruption of the clergy and the consequent petrifaction of the life of the 'true Church.'

> They explicitly condemned and combated the corruption and accretions of the Church in the centuries since its foundation, going back to a simplified form of worship that rejected the authority of the priesthood and such elements of orthodox worship as infant baptism, the veneration of saints and martyrs, and the necessity of huge and expensive edifices in which to worship.[244]

This emphasis on the moral deficiencies of the Church – something evident to all, despised by all, but publically noted by few – earned both Waldo and his disciples the enmity of the Inquisition. Waldo's teachings were benign and Scriptural, as far as they went, and it was only the implacable opposition of the clergy and Pope that drove his movement into separation from the Church, and thus into the clutches of the inquisitors.

> He was content to carry on his evangelistic work within the church. His object at first was to reform the church by teaching the Scriptures and preaching the gospel to the common people in their own language. If the church had allowed him this liberty, he would probably not have become a separatist.[245]

'If the Church had only…' But, in fact, the medieval Church could not grant such liberty, for in doing so it would destroy itself. Although not thereby deserving of persecution and death, the Cathari were heretical with regard to orthodox Christian doctrine of any stripe. The Waldensians, however, were far closer to the truth than the Dominicans who persecuted them or the Popes who proscribed them. An early English Reformer, John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, included Peter Waldo in the triumvirate of the 'Pre-reformers.'

[244] Burman; 21.
[245] Newman, *A Manual of Church History*; 571.

> As for John Wycliffe, John Hus, Valdo and the rest for ought I know, and I believe setting malice aside, for ought you know, they were godly men. Their greatest heresy was this…That they desired the reformation of the Church.[246]

The Spanish Inquisition:

The Papal Inquisition had largely burnt itself out in excessive violence and corruption by the time the more famous *Spanish Inquisition* began. This phase of the Inquisition, employing the same methods and yielding the same vicious results, was part and parcel of the Reconquista of Spain by the united houses of Castile and Aragon, under their monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. The recovery of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors began almost as soon as the Muslim invaders had successfully conquered the land, and for seven hundred years Catholic forces slowly pushed back the Islamic tide. Finally, in 1492, the combined forces of Castile (Queen Isabella) and Aragon (King Ferdinand) defeated the remaining Moors, who were thereafter expelled under the Treaty of Grenada. The two Spanish monarchs were denominated Most Catholic by Pope Alexander VI (himself a Spaniard of the powerful Borgia family), for having defended Catholic dogma through their faithful use of all means, including military.

These 'means' of uniting and bringing uniformity to their large Spanish dominions quickly included the adaptation of the Inquisition to Spanish society.Burman writes that 'there were three main reasons behind this foundation: a political decision to achieve religious conformity in Spain, the failure to do so by enforcing conversion of the Jewish and Moorish population, and a profound fear that insincere converts would contaminate the Christian faith."[247] To the task of ensuring the removal of all impurities from Spanish Christendom was appointed the most notorious of all inquisitors, Tomás de Torquemada. Spain's first Inquisitor General's hatred and persecution of Jews

[246] Quoted in Burman; 73n.
[247] Burman; 136.

Torquemada (1420-98)

and Muslims is made all the more ironic by the fact that he himself was the grandson of a *converse* – a person who converted to Christianity either from Judaism or Islam. The Spanish Inquisition was notorious for the use of torture to extract confessions from the accused, though it may be that the infliction of agony was no worse in Spain than in other areas of the Inquisition – it was horrible in all places. Still, due to the extant records of the Spanish Inquisition being even *more* thorough than the already meticulous annals of the other inquisitorial venues, there is at least reason to suspect that things were particularly bad in Spain. Burman, who consistently attempts to down-play the severity of the Inquisition in his work, admits as much when he writes,

> And appalling accounts of torture by the Spanish Inquisition, with accuracy and detail that suggest veracity, do exist. As Tuberville has observed, perhaps the most moving testimony in the literature of the Inquisition are the detailed *memoranda*, in which official notaries faithfully recorded every shout, cry and complaint in a dry almost legal language that was written with no desire to shock but does so by its chilling realism.[248]

The Holy Office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:

The Spanish Inquisition lasted well into the 17th Century, and possibly into the 18th. But the Inquisition is gone now; or so it seems. The methodology of the Papal and Spanish Inquisitions is no longer used, at least not to any public knowledge. But the Inquisition had another, official, name at its founding in the Middle Ages: **The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition**, and its place in the Roman Curia was secured by a most powerful cardinal who was appointed Secretary of the Holy Office of this 'Congregation.' Bowing to growing public abhorrence to the Church's history in the era of Inquisition, Rome changed the name of this branch of the Curia to **The**

[248] Burman; 148.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; it is commonly known in Catholic countries simply as 'the Holy Office.' It is the oldest continuous department of the Roman Curia, and it still has teeth. It was before the Holy Office that Galileo was famously tried and convicted of heresy in 1633.

The responsibility of the Holy Office today rests mostly with ensuring adherence to orthodoxy among teachers in Catholic universities, the banning of unacceptable books, and the review and approval of all books to be published for reading by Catholic audiences. It is the Holy Office that grants the *imprimatur* on all books acceptable according to orthodox doctrine, the Latin word meaning 'let it be printed.' Pope John Paul II reasserted the authority of the Holy Office in 1988 when he wrote, "The proper duty of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is to promote and safeguard the doctrine on faith and morals in the whole Catholic world; so it has competence in things that touch this matter in any way."[249] The Prefect of the Holy Office at that time was Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who would succeed John Paul II as Pope Benedict XVI.

Pope Benedict XVI

[249] *Apostolic Constitution of the Catholic Church;* June 29, 1988.

Session 12: **The Fall of Christendom**

Text Reading: **Ezekiel 34:1 - 10**

"The popes of the fifteenth century
were in thought and deed Greek despots.
They were not disciples of the lowly Man of Nazareth,
much less His vicars."
(J. L. Neve)

There are some basic rules for maintaining a totalitarian system for the long run. First, be sure not to take too much from the people; fleece the flock, but leave a little bit of wool for the winter. Second, maintain at least the façade of respectability and concern for the welfare of the state, even if you are in the process of pillaging it for your own benefit. Finally, maintain the moral high ground. In other words, present a dignified public face that oozes with integrity, even if it is only for the cameras. At bottom, people know that totalitarian rulers are depots, and sometimes thugs. But if the system runs smoothly, if the ruling elite leaves the lesser peoples some money to live on, and if it all appears to be for the good of the whole, then amazingly the citizens of such a state will allow it to go on indefinitely.

Apparently these lessons were not taught in the monasteries, cathedral schools, and universities of Medieval Europe, for once the papacy had secured for itself near absolute sway over the temporal and spiritual affairs of Western Europe, it proceeded to fritter it away by violating each of these 'rules.' One can almost hear the proponents of a strong papacy yelling from the sidelines, 'Keep it together, man!'; but it was not to be. The men who occupied the Throne of St. Peter in the 14th and 15th Centuries were, on the whole, as irreligious, immoral, and patently unconcerned a group of incompetents as could have been dreamed up by the most inveterate enemy of the papacy. Beginning with Boniface VIII in 1294, the papacy began a rapid descent into self-destruction and irrelevancy that ended with the hedonist Leo X – himself the scion of the d'Medici clan –

presiding over the Protestant Reformation at the beginning of the 16th Century. In Time magazine's 2010 article entitled "Ten Most Controversial Popes," six are from the era between the papacy of Innocent III to the Protestant Reformation.[250] To be sure, the police state established during the 13th Century was powerful and efficient, and its mechanism continued to work even under bad popes. But the fish rots from the head down, as they say, and the latter years of Christendom saw some pretty stinky carp on the Fisherman's Throne. Even the throne itself can no longer be spoken of as singular in this era, for during a large portion of it there were two popes, and at times three. Albert Henry Newman employs the art of understatement when he describes this era: "The spectacle of two popes (sometimes three) excommunicating and anathematizing each other was by no means edifying."[251]

The Decline of Papal Power:

The beginning of the end came in the 13th Century, although the change in trajectory from upward to downward was not immediately perceptible. The basic problem was *overreach*. The popes had grabbed for too much when they sought to add *temporal* power to their already secure *spiritual* dominion. From Gregory VII to Innocent III the papacy saw its power and influence steadily rise at the expense of the national rulers and emperors of Europe, and their vision of a united Christendom – a Holy Roman Empire – was as close as ever to being fulfilled. "In their efforts to implement their dream the Popes had developed an ecclesiastical structure which reached throughout most of Western Europe and which made necessary an elaborate bureaucracy at its centre."[252] But these popes ignored the fact that another power was growing alongside of their own – the

[250] http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1981842_1981844_1981869,00.html. The number should really be seven out of ten, for Time inexplicably omitted Julius II, the warrior pope, from its list.
[251] Newman, *A Manual of Church History*; 525.
[252] Latourette, Kenneth Scott; *A History of Christianity: Volume I* (San Francisco: Harper & Row; 1974); 625.

Nation-State – that would ultimately carry Europe into world domination in the coming centuries. First, however, the 'two swords' were on a collision course at the end of the Middle Ages, and the spiritual power would ultimately lose to the temporal.

This collision was unnecessary. Had the popes satisfied themselves with wielding the 'sword of the spirit,' and allow the kings and emperors latitude in their own handling of the civil sword, the occasional conflicts might not have accumulated to the bringing down of the entire edifice of Christendom. Innocent III, however, aspired to the supremacy of both swords, and his successors – all of lesser ability than he – generally exerted their utmost effort to bring about this end. "In general it may be said that most of the factors that entered into the growth of papal power afterward cooperated in working its overthrow."[253] By the papacy of Julius II, just before the Protestant Reformation, the Pope was leading troops into battle, and spending more time in the saddle than on the papal throne.

It may be judged that Innocent III acted as a man of conscience and in the best interest of the Church as he perceived that interest. He was a deeply religious man, and his piety (though only God knows the heart) was as famous as his diplomacy. But when the power of the papal throne became strong - in large measure due to the work of this earnest pope – the office itself became an object of ambition, and not the worthy kind at that.

> The cardinals restricted the choice [of pope] to their own number. Bitter factions were developed among them. Weeks and sometimes months elapsed before an election could be reached and frequently rival popes were elected by rival factions. It became a common practice of the cardinals to elect the oldest and most infirm of their number as pope, so that the next election might not be unduly delayed. Thus the papal government became weak and contemptible.[254]

[253] Newman; 518.
[254] *Ibid.*; 520.

This phenomenon drew the powerful families of Europe into the fray, and the papacy would at times be held by a representative of the Colonna family, at times the Borgia, the della Rovera, and the d'Medici – all families known for their immorality, their thirst for power, but not for their piety. The result was moral bankruptcy by the middle of the 15th Century, and ultimately the revolution known as the Protestant Reformation. "The Papacy was paying the price for having utilized the kind of power which seemed essential to the realization of its objectives but which entailed contradictions of Christian ethical and spiritual principles."[255]

Boniface VIII and *Unam Sanctam*:

Boniface VIII (*r.* 1294-1303)

Most historians mark the beginning of the decline of the Papacy with the reign of Boniface VIII from 1294 until his death in 1303. Yet unlike the popes who would follow him, Boniface strikes one as a tragic figure, a man who desired to reinvigorate the papacy along the lines of its greatest pontiff, Innocent III, but who did not possess the skill sets of his illustrious papal ancestor. As pope Boniface had the misfortune of encountering a resurgent France under one of the few capable rulers of the Capetian line, Philip IV, known as 'the Fair.' Even locked in conflict with the redoubtable King Edward I of England, Philip proved a match for Boniface VIII, and may reasonably be credited with striking the first and most damaging blow against the edifice that was the medieval papacy.

The issue, of course, came down to money – specifically whose right it was to control the taxes and the gold of any nation, that nation's king or the Roman Pontiff. Philip's ongoing war with his vassal, Edward I of England, depleted his coffers. But an even greater stream of gold was departing France on

[255] Latourette; 626.

its way to Rome as payment for the multitude of tithes, taxes, annates, benefices, reservations, and other expenses that had been set up by previous popes to grease the ever-expanding wheels of the Papal Curia. Philip refused that any further monies should be paid to Rome, an act which resulted in a condemnation from Boniface VIII. Philip responded by forbidding the export of gold beyond the borders of France for any purpose – an extremely politic move since the payment of papal duties were required in gold. This brought Boniface to his knees, at least temporarily.

It was during this conflict between the two swords that Boniface promulgated the papal bull for which he is famous: *Unum Sanctam* – 'One Sanctuary.' In this treatise Boniface pushed papal supremacy to its extreme, and set forth the principle that by virtue of the Pope being the Vicar of Christ on Earth, he must be the possessor of *both* the temporal and the spiritual swords. Boniface strains exegetical technique, employing the disciples response to Jesus' question with regard to weapons in Luke 22 as proof that the two swords of Church and State belong to the Pope,

> *Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end." So they said, "**Lord, look, here are two swords**." And He said to them, "It is enough."*
>
> (Luke 22:36-38)

Boniface writes,

> We are informed by the texts of the gospels that in this Church and in its power are two swords; namely, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the Apostles say: '*Behold, here are two swords*' [Lk 22:38] that is to say, in the Church, since the Apostles were speaking, the Lord did not reply that there were too many, but sufficient. Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: '*Put up thy sword into thy scabbard*' [Mt 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the former is to be

> administered for the Church but the latter by the Church; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest. However, one sword ought to be subordinated to the other and temporal authority, subjected to spiritual power. For since the Apostle said: '*There is no power except from God and the things that are, are ordained of God*' [Rom 13:1-2], but they would not be ordained if one sword were not subordinated to the other and if the inferior one, as it were, were not led upwards by the other.[256]

Boniface summarizes his position by putting the Roman Pontiff in the place of the Prophet Jeremiah, to whom God said, "*See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant.*"[257] *Unam Sanctam* concludes, "Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff."[258] Boniface was not the first Pope to assert such audacious claims, but in 1302 it was the wrong time and he was the wrong Pope. "Western Europe was by no means ready to surrender. Boniface met with the most disgraceful disaster. He was taken prisoner by the French king, and this incident ushered in one of the most ignominious periods in the history of the papacy."[259] The dignity of the papal office was sufficient to motivate the people to rise up in support of Boniface, and he did again attain his freedom. But he was by that point a broken man, and died the next year.

Boniface's treatise *Unam Sanctam* and his conflict with Philip the Fair make him a common enough name among historians. But he also gained infamy among literature scholars as well, due to the pen of one **Dante Alighieri**, one of the most famous of the cadre of Renaissance poets of the 14th and 15th Centuries. Dante's family was part of the Guelphs, a political component of society in

[256] Pope Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*; http://www.americancatholictruthsociety.com/docs/unamsanctum.htm
[257] Jeremiah 1:10.
[258] Boniface; *op cit.*
[259] Neve; 207.

league with the Pope against the Ghibellines, who supported the Holy Roman Emperor. When the Guelphs triumphed over the Ghibellines (this is not from a Dr. Seuss story, I promise), they in turn divided into the White Guelphs and the Black Guelphs. Boniface threw his support to the Black Guelphs, and Dante was part of the White Guelphs. The poet was exiled, and his resentment toward the Pope found outlet through his pen. Boniface was thus immortalized in both *The Divine Comedy* and *The Inferno*. In the latter work Boniface is found in the Third Circle of Hell (*Lt.* Inferno), the realm designated for gluttons.

Dante (1265-1321)

The Babylonian Captivity:

Boniface was succeeded by an Italian pope whose reign, however, lasted just over one year. **Clement V** was thereafter elected and reigned from 1305-14. Clement was the former Archbishop of Bordeaux and had been a personal favorite of Boniface. However he was also on friendly terms with Philip of France, and had apparently made arrangements with the French king to relocate the papacy to a place where it would be 'more convenient' to the French. Clement V found good reason to depart Rome, for the city had been in political turmoil for years and this situation led to great decay to the infrastructure. In short, it was a violent and dirty place to live. Clement removed the Papal Curia to Avignon, now in France but at the time in the province of Burgundy. Avignon is an alpine city of great beauty – clean air and water, temperate climate and lush green vistas – and ideally suited for an ecclesiastical royal court to set up shop.

Thus began the 'Babylonian Captivity' of the Church, although it was a willing captivity. The Nebuchadnezzar of this captivity was the French king and court, and every pope elected from 1305 until 1377 was of French nationality. Ridiculously, each man was compelled to promise a return to Rome as price of his election to the papal throne; and each subsequently found reasons to delay

such a move indefinitely. The ludicrous nature of this situation is obvious: the institution that founded its universal authority upon the integrity of St. Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, and exerted its utmost influence to spread that authority radially from that bishopric to overspread the whole of Europe (and, for a time, even Constantinople), now resided in the French alpine city of Avignon.

The quality of men who wore the papal tiara during this period were *almost* the lowest caliber in the history of the institution (the worst was yet to come).

> Every known way of raising money was resorted to. Venality, mendacity, and licentiousness abounded. The spirit of resistance to papal absolutism that had long ago begun to manifest itself now became well-nigh universal. [260]

The situation denigrated to such a low ebb that even the French court – the chief beneficiaries of the Avignon Papacy – began to pressure the pope to return to Rome. There was just something painfully destabilizing about having the Roman Pontiff living in luxury in a cozy alpine town; most Europeans were far more comfortable with him living in luxury in Rome. Famous prophetesses – **Catherine of Sienna** and Brigitta of Sweden – denounced successive popes as being unfaithful and antichrists, unless they returned the vicarage of Christ to its proper abode, Rome. Buckling under the pressure, the penultimate Avignon Pope, Urban V, returned the Curia to Rome. But he found the city so dissolute and dangerous that he returned to Avignon three years later. It was left to Gregory XI, Urban's successor, to try again and he took up residence in Rome in 1377. The strain was too great for him, and he died in Rome in 1378. But at least the Babylonian Captivity was over…or was it?

The Great Schism:

[260] Newman; 523.

The polity of the Roman Catholic Church requires that the election of a pope take place in the city where the previous pope died. The electing cardinals therefore convened in Rome to choose a replacement for Gregory. There were eleven French cardinals – a result of almost seventy years of French popes – and only five Italian cardinals. Hence the election of a French pope seemed a *fait accompli*, at least until the Roman people insinuated themselves into the process. This they did by refusing the delivery of food and wine to the house where the cardinals were gathered (such wine, that is, that the crowd did not consume itself), and by constantly shouting outside the windows, "Give us a Roman Pope, or at least an Italian," and finally by breaking into the first floor of the building and jabbing spears through the floorboards of the room where the cardinals met. Some accounts report that the mob also chanted, "Take heed! Take heed! Or we'll turn your heads redder than your hats!" These cardinals, astute politicians all, miraculously elected the archbishop of Bari as Pope Urban VI. He was not a Roman, but he was at least an Italian.

As soon as they could the cardinals vacated Rome and headed back to Avignon. Once there they quickly repudiated the election of Urban as being made under duress (well, yes…), and reconvened in Avignon to elect a Frenchman, Robert of Geneva, as pope. He took the title Clement VII but is not recognized by the Catholic Church in the lists of its popes. Rather he is considered the first of two 'antipopes' who ruled from Avignon during the Great Schism. Thus "for a generation, from 1378 to 1417, Western Europe was divided between rival Popes, always at least two, and latterly three, each supported by a section of the Church."[261]

The basic problem at this time – beside the fact that there were now two, now three, 'Vicars of Chris' on earth – was that the peoples of Western Europe had become nations, and these nations had come into their own in regard to both political and ecclesiastical power. France's Philip had shown his ability to resist

[261] Latourette; 626.

(and even remove) the Pope, but this had also been done a century earlier by the Emperor Frederick II, and even earlier than Frederick the English King Henry II proved himself to be a tough rod for the Pope to bend to his will. By the 14th Century, however, kings aligned themselves in accordance with their state interests; their churches and church leaders usually followed suit. Thus,

> During part of the time France, Scotland, Savoy, Lorrain, Castille, Aragon, and Naples adhered to one pope (Avignon), while Germany, England, Denmark, Poland, Prussia, and the rest of Italy, adhered to another (Rome). The spectacle of two popes (sometimes three) excommunicating and anathematizing each other was by no means edifying.[262]

The Conciliar Movement:

The Catholic scholars and kings of Europe, however, knew that this situation could not continue without doing irreparable damage to the very fabric of Western European society. In fact, the damage was already done, but it would take another century for that truth to manifest itself through the Protestant Reformation. But the Pope and Antipope could not be convinced to abdicate in favor of the other, and neither trusted the other to abdicate in response to a unilateral move by one. Furthermore, both papal courts were sinking deeper and deeper into immorality, simony, nepotism, and debauchery and were no less inclined to clean up their moral house than they were to fix the ecclesiastical one. The papacy of the late 14th and early 15th Centuries was starting to make the papacy of the 9th and 10th Centuries look good by comparison.

The burden fell to the universities, and particularly the University of Paris, to find a solution. This they did in the concept of the ecumenical council, and in a movement known historically as the Conciliar. The principle of this movement was that an ecumenical council of the Church possessed more authority than a pope and such a council, following the original precedent of Nicæa, could be convened by the civil ruler. "Indeed, now that the Papacy was

[262] Newman; 525.

divided and had proved incapable of stamping out the grievous abuses which crippled the Church, many hoped that by gaining recognition of the authority of a general or ecumenical council as superior to that of the Pope, not only would unity be restored but the Church would be cleansed."[263] This was, in fact, an early attempt at reformation, though one of polity and practice rather than of doctrine.

The antipope Clement VII did not live to see this movement gain impetus, dying in 1394. Despite prohibitions from the French king, the Avignon cardinals elected a successor, who took the title Benedict XIII and is now known as the second antipope. With opposition to the Schism mounting across Europe in both courts and universities, both popes sought ways to find common ground. At one point each sent four cardinals to meet at Livorno in an attempt to agree on the place and agenda of a reforming council. The Roman Pope at that time, Gregory XII, "professed a consuming zeal for papal unity" and asserted that he "would go in a fishing-boat or on foot, if necessary, to confer with his rival."[264] Both men wanted there to be *one* Church with *one* Head; unfortunately both men wanted to be that head.

The Council of Pisa:

Finally a council was convened in Pisa in 1409 under the protection of Charles VI, King of France. It was attended by a huge congregation of cardinals, bishops, ecclesiastics, monks, theologians from the universities, and official deputies of most of the monarchs and princes of Europe. Gregory XII and Benedict XIII were both summoned to the council; both refused to attend. The cardinals attached to each pope were persuaded to abandon their loyalties, and the Roman Pope and the Avignon Pope were condemned *in abstentia* as

[263] Latourette; 608.
[264] Newman; 527.

"schismatical, abettors of schism, heretics, and guilty of perjury."[265] Both were deposed and excommunicated by the council, and a new pope elected as Alexander V. The papal count is now three.

> Notwithstanding the apparent strength of the council, the schism was not healed. There were now three popes instead of two, who persisted in heaping upon each other the most terrific anathemas. Benedict (at Avignon) was acknowledged by Spain, Portugal, and Scotland; Gregory (at Rome) by Naples, Hungary, and parts of Germany; while Alexander was supported by France, England, and other parts of Germany.[266]

The Council of Constance:

History records three lists of popes during this period: the Roman Popes, the Avignon Popes, and the Pisan Popes, the latter deriving their authority from the Council of Pisa but residing in Bologna. Of the latter Avignon line and of the Pisan line there were but two popes each, and the last Pisan Pope – John XXIII – was so notoriously evil that his title and number did not register in the Catholic annals. The 'official' Pope John XXIII was the much-beloved pontiff who ruled from 1958 – 1963, who called together the popular council of Vatican II.

It did not take a Sorbonne scholar to conclude that the Council of Pisa had failed. Indeed, that council has not been accorded 'ecumenical' status in the official Catholic histories due in part to its failure to heal the Great Schism, and in part to the fact that it was neither convened nor approved by a Pope. In the meantime things were getting worse with regard to Christendom, and the Morningstars of the Reformation were already in the land. John Wyclif in England, and later Jan Hus in Bohemia, were launching effective attacks on the very integrity of the papacy while also leading the way to both ecclesiastical *and* doctrinal reform within the Church. This movement threatened the very

[265] *Ibid.*; 528.
[266] Newman; 528. It is a testimony to the growing influence of the conciliar movement that England and France together supported the council's pope, and were remarkably joined in that by large segments of Germany. There are few similar instances of unity between these three countries in European history.

foundation of the institutional church of the Middle Ages, and the Catholic powers arrayed themselves to stop it.

Thus the Council of Constance was convened in 1414, called by the Emperor Sigismund and attended by the largest assembly of church officials in the history of all councils dating back to Nicæa. The council got to work quickly on the Schism, and brought John XXIII to heal by threatening to imprison him for his many instances of wickedness – far too many for the Pisan pontiff to try to deny. He was offered the position of cardinal-bishop if he abdicated, and of prison if he did not. One pope down; two to go. The council offered a cardinal-ship to the Roman Pope, Gregory XII, who resigned and lived out the rest of his life in dignity and honor. That left only Benedict XIII in Avignon, and he proved the most recalcitrant.

Here the Council simply bypassed the obstacle, and elected Cardinal Otho Colonna as Pope Martin V. Benedict was excommunicated as an antipope and though he remained in Avignon to his death, 'ruling' over a rump curia and church, he was entirely marginalized from this point onward. The Avignon cardinals continued their machinations beyond Benedict's death, but by then no one was paying attention. The Great Schism was over, and it would seem the power of the papacy broken over the rock of the Conciliar Movement. Had that truly been the case, it is quite possible that the Protestant Reformation would never have occurred.

Power and Degeneracy United – the Renaissance Popes:

Martin V gave lip service to honoring the authority of the council, and faithfully called the prescribed follow-up Council of Basel in 1431 (the Council of Constance stipulated that an ecumenical council be called at least once per decade). But by this time in the Middle Ages, a Pope without supreme power was no Pope at all, and Martin V was as aware of this fact as his more illustrious predecessors Innocent III and Gregory VII. Furthermore, Europe was used to a

powerful Pope, and it seemed essential in most men's minds to the very stability of Christendom and to the eternal hope of their souls. Few outside the Council of Constance were interested in having Christianity ruled by committee.

Thus reformation was stillborn. The papacy was restored to Rome, where it remained and restored its power and opulence, led by men who were more Greek despot than Christian Bishop.[267]

> Now that there was only one Pope and the power to control him through a council representative of the entire Church had failed, the Papacy became even more a centre of corruption. It was captured by the Renaissance and secularistic humanism. Men ambitious for ostentatious luxury and for power and prestige of a kind which was entirely contrary to the genius of the Christian Gospel worked their way into the Papal curia and even into the college of cardinals and into the Papacy itself. They did not come all at once. It was not until the close of the fifteenth century that the Papacy reached its lowest depth of moral degradation. Then it did so on a tragically grand scale in an individual of outstanding ability and force of character, but who was as nearly the opposite of the Christian ideal as it is possible for a man to be.[268]

Rodrigo Borgia (1431-1503)

This man was Rodrigo Borgia, who reigned as Pope Alexander VII and was by many accounts the most depraved man ever to hold that office. His family, the Borgia, are notorious for licentiousness, immorality, and just pure criminality. Alexander fathered numerous offspring, the most famous being his daughter, Lucrezia, and the most infamous his son, Cæsar. The allegations that some of Alexander's children were sired on Lucrezia has too much contemporary testimony to be entirely dismissed, although it should be said on her account that her later legitimate marriage lasted a long time and to all outward appearances was a happy one. One writer sagely states that she was probably more sinned upon, than sinner. Yet it is just one chapter

[267] Neve; 209.
[268] Latourette; 636.

of the sordid biography of Alexander VI. He was excessively fond of his children and advanced them into high ecclesiastical or political office. The worst of the lot was his son Cæsar, whom Alexander made a cardinal at the age of eighteen. Cæsar was hardly ecclesiastical material (not cut of that cloth, so to speak), and involved himself in the deepest debaucheries, the wickedest intrigues, and the dirtiest political machinations possible. His brother Giovanni was assassinated under mysterious circumstances, with most people believing that Cæsar had committed the murder. His end was as his life, violent; he was killed in battle in 1507.

The irony of the Renaissance Popes was their ardent support of the arts and literature. Alexander, for instance, was the patron of no less than Michaelangelo, whom the Pope employed to decorate the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. The Pope also supported education, and chartered King's College in Aberdeen, Scotland, which became and remains the central collegiate institution of the University of Aberdeen. Thus the Renaissance Popes mixed their own immorality with a high degree of cultural urbanity, a combination that made them very attractive to their contemporaries and repugnant to the spirit of the Church they were raised to lead.

Indeed, for the most part the Renaissance Popes led everything but the Church. Their lives were usually at the center of a grand court steeped in incredible luxury. The most important office of the Curia to these Popes was the Treasury – of *money* not of *merit* – and they exerted Machiavellian force to keep the coffers full. This pursuit involved them necessarily in the political intrigues of Europe, and so at least one of these Popes led his troops into battle: Julius II, the Warrior Pope. "Julius was the most warlike of all the popes. He could not endure the presence of foreign powers in Italy and he maintained and used great armies in driving them out."[269] This line of Popes terminated in Leo X, a

[269] Newman; 539.

d'Medici, who famously announced upon his election, "God has given us the Papacy; let us enjoy it." It was time for a Reformation.

Session 12: **Darkness Before the Dawn**

Text Reading: **I Kings 19:9 - 18**

"Amid prayer and praise he expired,
joyfully and confidently,
one of the numerous company of martyrs who with their blood
have sealed a good confession."
(J. H. Kurtz)

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

October 31st is celebrated in several countries around the world – some even predominantly Catholic countries - as Reformation Day in commemoration of the efforts of the German Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, to reform the corrupt Roman Catholic Church of his day. The day after had long been honored in Christendom as *All Saints Day*, hence the evening of the 31st came to be called *All Saints Eve* – or even more commonly, *All Hallows Eve*. In modern Western culture this has long been contracted to *Halloween*. In an effort to forestall the negative connotations of the modern celebration of this event, many evangelical churches have re-christened October 31st as Reformation Day, and their congregations offer Halloween alternative events on the same evening.

However, it is somewhat disingenuous to pinpoint the beginning of the Reformation to the day when Luther apparently nailed his *95 Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, thus following the normal method by which a professor announced his upcoming lecture topic. For one thing, not all of the theses listed on Luther's pronouncement would be widely considered as either 'reformed' or protestant' today, as many of them were in complete agreement with current Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. But the main reason for disavowing October 31st as the beginning of the Reformation is the historical fact

than no movement of such scope and impact has ever just 'started' on a particular day. The movement to independence that brought about the United States of America did not commence on July 4, 1776; nor was Bastille Day the beginning of the French Revolution. And these comparisons are apt, for the Protestant Reformation was more of a *revolution* than a *revival*, and it was as much political and national as it was religious. There were broad streams of momentous force – political, religious, nationalistic, and economic - flowing through the late 14th and the 15th Centuries, carrying a rising tide of disaffection with the status quo of Christendom. These streams would find their confluence in cities like Wittenberg in Saxony, and Zurich in Switzerland, but en route they flowed through universities in Prague, in Paris, and in Oxford, England.

Christendom was falling apart, and the medieval dream of a holy and united spiritual empire – the Holy Roman Empire – was fading fast from the consciousness of Western Europe. But neither the Emperor nor the Pope were willing to let the dream die without a fight, and the preparatory movements that would give ultimate birth to the Protestant Reformation were often met with harsh invective and violent persecution. The century and a half before Luther posted his famous theses saw amazing individual and collective efforts in the direction of true reformation, but all were extinguished as just so many brush fires. This period was the darkness before the dawn, but in it the foundations were laid upon which Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin would build a reformed Christianity.

Four Rivers of Reform:

If we were to employ the exegetical methods popular during the early years of the Reformation, we would establish an allegorical approach to the history of the momentous event by drawing on the four rivers that flowed out of Eden. But frankly, the interpretive methods of Luther were a bit over the top to modern standards, and we must content ourselves with noting four broad

streams of social currents that each contributed massively – and perhaps even *necessarily* – to the advent and relative success of the Protestant Reformation. These streams were the ***Intellectual***, the ***Pietistic***, the ***Augustinian Revival***, and the ***Technological***.

The *Intellectual* stream was itself a movement of broad scope and indeterminate origins: the **Renaissance**. The genesis of the 'new birth' in learning is usually assigned to the region of Italy known as Tuscany, and particularly to the city of Florence. The movement touched many different areas of the liberal arts: science (natural philosophy), literature, music, and art being the main themes. Petrarch (1304-74) is generally considered the Father of Renaissance Humanism; he, Dante (1265-1321) and Boccaccio (1313-75) are known as the "Three Fountains" from which the Renaissance flowed. Hence literature took the lead in the revival of learning, and the liberation of the arts from hidebound tradition and ecclesiastical stricture. But that literature had a purpose: to uncover the truth, hidden both in the Scriptures but also in the Classics of ancient Greece and Rome; to expose hypocrisy and ignorance, especially within the hierarchy of the Church and in the mendicant orders; to bring mankind to a better understanding of his own native ability to think and create. DaVinci and Michelangelo would be just two of the byproducts of this movement, as would Copernicus and Galileo, and Erasmus and Luther. But the current that most directly influences the Protestant Reformation was the consistent desire of Renaissance humanist scholars to cut through the centuries of accreted tradition and commentary, and to go 'back to the sources.

Ad fontes – Latin for 'to the sources' – became the battle cry of Renaissance scholarship, as university professors eschewed the traditions of the Schoolmen, and the layer upon layer of commentary put upon their 'sentences,' and returned as much as possible to the original documents. This necessitated and fostered as well a return to the *language* of the original documents, including the Latin of Cicero, but also the Greek of Homer and of the Apostle Paul, and even in some

cases the ancient Hebrew of the Old Testament. What was discovered in this process was that the Latin translations of the Bible and of other important treatises and books were often woefully inaccurate. This would provide a powerful impetus to new translations of the Scriptures from the original Greek and Hebrew, not only into Latin but also into the vernacular of Western European countries. This alone would have proven to be destabilizing to Christendom, but more was to come.

Erasmus (1466-1536)

There were many scholars who contributed to this advance in literary knowledge, and to the removal of centuries of error and falsehood accumulated through the Middle Ages. But the most significant, by all by unanimous consent among historians, was Desiderius Erasmus, the epitome of Renaissance scholar and author. Born illegitimate in Rotterdam, Holland, Erasmus was nonetheless given a stable home until the deaths of his parents from the plague in 1483. He was accorded an excellent education and, upon being orphaned, was further trained in monastic schools run by the Brethren of the Common Life, of whom we will hear more later in this session.

Erasmus early developed a strong religious bent which leaned toward the pietism of the Brethren and distinctly away from the scholasticism of the Schoolmen. He also possessed an acute and cynical frame of mind, which latched upon the material excesses and moral indiscretions of the clergy and mendicant orders, and never let go. He was soon recognized across Europe as a top-notch scholar and a 'man of letters,' meaning a man both well read and well written. His most famous works are the *Enchiridon* or 'Manual of Christian Practice,' and *In Praise of Folly*, a satire on the pitiful and hypocritical state of the Church clergy and hierarchy. Both contributed greatly to his fame, both among other scholars but also among the nobility of Europe and the burgeoning

merchant classes. But they also set many within the clergy, and almost all within the monastic orders, against him.

As significant as these works were to his own fame, the one that bore most directly upon the Reformation just over the horizon, was Erasmus' translation of the New Testament from the original Greek. Erasmus collected and collated as many manuscript copies of the original books of the New Testament as he could find, and worked from what he considered the best textual evidence to amend and correct Jerome's Vulgate Latin Bible which had been in use within the Western Church for over one thousand years. What he discovered were numerous and troubling errors within the 'Scriptures' being used (to the extent the Scriptures were used at all) in the Church of his day. He wrote to a friend,

> But one thing the facts cry out, and it can be clear, as they say, even to a blind man, that often through the translator's clumsiness or inattention the Greek has been wrongly rendered; often the true and genuine reading has been corrupted by ignorant scribes, which we see happen every day, or altered by scribes who are half-taught and half-asleep.[270]

Erasmus' translation was a vast improvement upon Jerome's, but it was still far from perfect. But for some reason yet unknown to historians, Erasmus included his collated Greek text along with his Latin translation: Greek text opposite Latin translation on each set of pages. Thus one of the foremost humanist scholars of the age sifted through the available manuscripts – some of which probably had not been viewed, much less read, in centuries – and produced an invaluable study aid to Renaissance scholars and Reformation preachers in the 16th Century. Shortly after its publication in 1516, a copy of Erasmus' Greek New Testament found its way into the hands of a Zurich priest by the name of Huldrych Zwingli. Zwingli immersed himself in the Greek, and wrote out most

Zwingli (1484-1531)

[270] *Collected Works of Erasmus: Volume 3* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; 1974); 194.

of the New Testament by hand using Erasmus' document, translating the Greek into Latin and German for his congregation at the Great Minster Church. Thus the Swiss Reformation may reasonably trace its beginnings to as early as 1516, a year before Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the door in Wittenberg.

Yet for all his labors and fame Erasmus ended up being a man without a home and without a cause. His later years were lived in the midst of the Lutheran controversy, and he tried mightily to steer a middle course between the Reformer of Wittenberg and the establishment Church. On the one hand he was torrid in his denunciations of the immorality and impiety of the clergy and monastic orders, while on the other hand he wrote refutations against Luther's treatises – especially Luther's view on sovereign predestination. Throughout it all Erasmus desired the reformation of the Church without its division, a dream that became more and more unreal as the first half of the 16th Century progressed.

> Erasmus' lifelong dream was to reform the Roman Catholic Church without breaking it apart. He believed that the way to accomplish this was through spreading the gospel of his philosophy of Christ, which meant a practical and peaceful Christian spirituality centered on the example of Jesus.[271]

Luther and Erasmus saw reformation of the Church from different perspectives, though neither was behind the other in their desire for reform itself. Luther saw the problem in the Church as primarily *theological*, whereas Erasmus saw the issues in predominantly *moral* hues. The latter chastised the clergy of his generation for their empty superstitions and meaningless rituals, charging them with providing a false example to the flock of Jesus Christ,

> You gaze in dumb amazement a the tunic or sweat cloth reputedly Christ's, yet half asleep you read the utterances of Christ? You believe it to be much more important that you possess a small piece of the cross in your house. Yet this

[271] Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1999); 362.

> latter is nothing in comparison with bearing the mystery of the cross in your breast.[272]

Erasmus' legacy is that of a Renaissance scholar, but not of a reformer. This is perhaps unfair, for he vigorously attempted reform in his own way and by his own understanding of the term. In this effort he is often credited with 'having laid the egg that Luther hatched.' But Erasmus never considered what Luther did to be *reform*. Their different temperaments prevented such an understanding. As Roger Olson succinctly puts the matter, "whereas Erasmus was a reformer, Martin Luther was more than a reformer. He was a revolutionary."[273]

But before we trace the theological stream – a revived Augustinianism – that bore Luther on its crest to Reformation, we must give further investigation to that mystical and pietistic movement within the pre-Reformation years. This was the *Pietistic* stream, and its influence has already been seen in the life and work of Erasmus. There were several strands of this movement, but perhaps the most significant was the one which developed in the Netherlands under the guidance of Gerhard Groote (1340-84) and Florens Radewyns (1350-1400). Together these two develop what became known as the *devotion moderna*, the 'New Devotion,' a biblical, semi-monastic life that focused on education in the original languages of Greek and Hebrew, ardent preaching along both moral and evangelistic lines, and semi-communal living that focused on practical piety.

The 14th Century saw the greatest outbreak of the bubonic plague during the Middle Ages, and the massive death toll from this horrible disease – upwards of 200 million perished in Europe alone – brought the spectre of mortality to the forefront of the minds of the survivors.[274] Material possessions and religious ceremony both faded in importance to the need for a right walk with God

[272] Erasmus, quoted in Olson; 363.
[273] *Ibid.*; 367.
[274] Gerhard Groote himself died of the plague at the age of 44, having contracted it while tending to the sick.

through Jesus Christ. Thus was born a quasi-evangelical movement that often spoke in such terms of grace and sovereignty as to presage the Reformation of the 16th Century. Yet for the most part the members of the young and growing Brethren of the Common Life were devout Catholics, adhering to the basics of Roman theology and practice, and were generally accepted even during the height of the Inquisition.

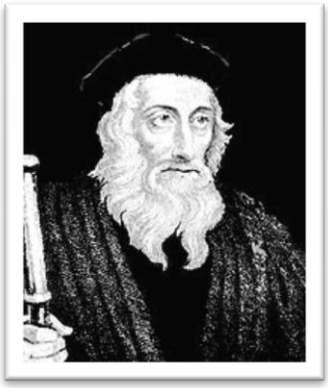
> The peculiarity of their organization consisted in their dispensing with vows, and voluntarily associating on the basis of devout living, combined with labor for support. Mendicancy (begging) was forbidden. The Brethren copied books and did various other kinds of remunerative work for their support, and engaged as far as practicable in teaching and preaching.[275]

A classic example of the literary production of the Brethren is the wonderful devotional attributed to Thomas á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*.[276] Thomas devoted his long life to quiet study and meditation, occupying his working hours with the copying of the Bible and other works. His devotional work has been translated into more languages than any other book except the Bible, and is still in print today and widely valued by both Catholics and Protestants. Both John Wesley and John Newton credited *Imitation of Christ* with influencing their own conversions, and British General Charles 'Chinese' Gordon, the martyr of Khartoum in 1885, carried a copy of the devotional with him on the battlefield.

The Brethren of the Common Life placed a premium on good education, and over the century and a half of its existence established schools throughout Europe, though primarily in the Netherlands. Erasmus would become proficient in Latin at a Brethren school. In addition, the emphasis on biblical study and on preaching that characterized the Brethren, led to a stream of evangelical teachers emanating from the Low Countries and influencing many other scholars across

[275] Newman, *A Manual of Church History*; 618.
[276] The book was written anonymously some time during the first quarter of the 15th Century, but was early attributed to Thomas, whose literary output and style justifies the honor.

Europe. These were the 'pre-Reformers,' several of whom began to teach *justification by faith* long before Martin Luther was even born. Space and time permits a brief review of only the two most famous of these: John Wyclif of England, and John (Jan) Hus of Bohemia.



John Wyclif (1320-84)

Wyclif is often called the 'Morningstar of the Reformation,' but he probably was not quite evangelical enough to fully deserve that title. Nonetheless his influence was very strong in England and elsewhere, especially with regard to the 'priesthood of believers' and the sole supremacy of the Bible in matters of theology and practice. His rise to fame occurred relatively late in life, coinciding with a conflict between the English crown and the Pope. Wyclif was a popular teacher at Oxford – a hotbed of reformist ideas in the 14th Century – and was asked by Parliament to help formulate a response for King Edward III to several obnoxious papal demands and taxes.

Wyclif's tack on the matter was quite favorable to the English Crown and government, as he advocated a very limited authority for the Pope within national borders. He opposed the clerical fees and taxes assessed on the English by the Roman Curia, and challenged the practice of foreign-born prelates being given English dioceses, usually without them actually living in their 'See.' This was in the midst of the Avignon Papacy, and shortly before the Great Schism. Wyclif's preaching and teaching on a limited papal authority expressed the general frustration of the time with 'Rome' (now that 'Rome' was, in fact, Avignon). The fact that the papacy was clearly under the thumb of the French monarch did not endear papal pronouncements to the Englishman's mind or heart, and Wyclif effectively tapped this reservoir of discontent.

> We see, therefore, that the time of Wycliffe there was a widespread opposition to papal usurpations – a strong national feeling for the maintenance of English independence. This feeling was chiefly political, but it afforded a grand opportunity for an able religious leader to combat the hierarchical church on religious grounds. Such a man was Wycliffe, combining patriotism and religious zeal in a remarkable degree, one of the greatest theologians of his day, and in ever way fitted to lead all classes of Englishmen.[277]

Consequently, many of the things Wyclif said were incendiary, particularly his rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation. He maintained a rigorous Augustinian view on predestination which set him squarely against the sacramentalism of the Roman Church. And he fully dismissed the authority of Pope or Council unless they agreed with Scripture - an early form of the Reformation dogma, *Sola Scriptura* – "Scripture Alone."

> If there were one hundred popes, and all the friars were turned into cardinals, their opinion ought not to be acceded to in matters of faith, except in so far as they base themselves on Scripture.[278]

The Church took steps to silence Wyclif, though amazingly the worst that befell him was to be forced into retirement at his pastorate of Lutterworth, where he continued to teach and preach and write. The Inquisition was never strong in England, as the English kings from Henry II on tended to shield their people from the encroachments of the ecclesiastical judiciary. But Wyclif also had the support of a very powerful man in England: John of Gaunt, the third surviving son of the king and perhaps the wealthiest man in all of Europe at that time. John, the 1st Duke of Lancaster and also the Duke of Aquitaine, was the most influential of the royal princes after the death of Edward, the Black Prince, in 1376. No one in his own time, and no one since, has accused John of

John of Gaunt (1340-99)

[277] Newman; 603-604.
[278] Wyclif, quoted in Newman; 607.

Gaunt of being religious; at best his life might have been described as moral *for the time*. But he liked what he heard from John Wyclif (perhaps because it kept more of England's wealth inside England, where he was steadily accumulating most of it for himself), and thus prevented the long arm of Papal intervention from reaching the Oxford professor. This historical phenomenon illustrates the very important principle of political protection necessary for religious reformation. We will see the pattern repeated numerous times over the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries, and also note the catastrophic results to reformation when the protection of the State is withheld or withdrawn.

Wyclif coordinated a translation of the Vulgate (Latin) Bible into the common English of his day, in order that 'unlettered' men could read the Scriptures for themselves. He held that the sacrament of Holy Orders was a false doctrine and practice, and believed that any man could preach the Gospel if he were well enough informed by Scripture. Accordingly he sent out itinerant preached, usually from either the academic world or from the ranks of the poor, to travel the English countryside and preach the Gospel wherever they might gain audience. These traveling preachers became known as the Lollard and, despite persecution that was at time exceedingly vigorous and violent, they continued to influence the beliefs of the rank-and-file English well into the next century.

Wyclif died in relative peace, in 1384, at the age of 63. Thirty years later his writings were condemned by the Council of Constance and he was excommunicated. The Council ordered that his bones be exhumed and burned, as it was against the doctrine of the Church for an excommunicant to rest in sacred ground. This edict was finally carried out in 1428; Wyclif's bones were burned and the ashes cast into the River Swift which runs through Lutterworth.

The next outbreak of reform fever occurred as an indirect result of the teachings of Wyclif, but in a location that the English pre-Reformer would have considered very foreign indeed: Bohemia. There was a connection between the

ancient Slavic land (now called the Czech Republic) and England: Edward III's successor, Richard II, was married to Anne of Luxembourg, sister to the Bohemian king. But the cultures of the two countries could hardly have been more unlike, and it is a singular example of divine providence that the seed sown by the English Wyclif would bear fruit in Eastern Europe. However, it appears that Anne was a woman of strong religious convictions coupled with strong reforming drive, and while in England she apparently exercised a moderating influence on a usually dissolute English court. In addition, many young scholars traveled to study at the University of Oxford during Anne's reign as England's Queen (which the plague brought to an end in 1394; Anne was only 28 years old). But the Bohemian scholars who thus returned to their native land, took with them the writings and the reputation of John Wyclif.

Jan Hus (1369-1415)

The most famous of the subsequent Bohemian Reformers was Jan Hus, the popular preacher at Bethlehem Chapel in Prague. Hus was not the theologian that Wyclif was, but he was just as popular a preacher and perhaps even more. Also, like Wyclif before him, Hus was able to harness a growing Bohemian nationalism that was exercising itself, first against German inhabitants of the land, and then against the pervasive authority of Rome. The constitution of the young University of Prague, which stipulated an equal vote to members of the ruling council from Saxony, Bavaria, Poland, and Bohemia, was revised by King Wenselaus at the urging of Hus. Now the Bohemian representatives on the university's board held three votes, while the other three regions merely combined as one vote. This caused an exodus of German-speaking professors and students from Prague, which is what the Bohemian people wanted anyway.

Hus instigated a militant stand against all papal interferences, and opposed the sale of indulgences in much the same manner as Luther would a hundred years later. This activity called down an excommunication upon Hus

and an interdict laid upon Prague. But the people were with Hus, and the king – though by all accounts a weak ruler – could do little else but support Hus, too. Hus was summoned to appear before the Pope but wisely refused to go. However, when called to appear before the Council of Constance in 1414, having been given a safe-conduct pass from the Emperor Sigismund, Hus acquiesced and traveled to Constance.

He was immediately arrested in Constance and thrown into prison, where he would languish in declining health for most of a year before being condemned and burned at the stake, July 6, 1415. In this the Council made the classic mistake (no, not launching a land war in Asia…): they made a martyr of Jan Hus. And the Bohemians did not take it kindly. "The burning of Hus did not end the movement of which he had been the leader. Indeed, it furthered it. Hus became a national hero."[279] Thus when the news of Hus' death reached Bohemia there was a violent outbreak of protest, and if anything, the anti-Catholic feelings of the people were intensified. Hus' disciples were emboldened to even greater reform efforts – such as giving the cup to the laity - and the Church responded by launching several 'crusades' into Bohemia.

The 'Hussite Wars' lasted for fifteen years, and represent the solidification of Bohemian nationalism into what became a unique 'Czech' identity that survives to this day. Successive attempts by the papal and imperial forces to subdue the Bohemians were defeated, and both were forced to acknowledge a strong and abiding Bohemian political and religious nationalism. The ultimate independence of the territory, however, was thwarted by divisions within, between one party that sought a compromise with Rome, and another that desired complete reform and separation from Rome. Internecine fighting broke out, with the 'hardliner' Taborites eventually defeated by the 'compromising' Calixtines. Thus again we see the influence of political currents upon the flow of reformation: The Hussite Reformation was extinguished, and another century

[279] Latourette; 669.

would pass before Martin Luther would proclaim before the Imperial Diet at Worms, *Ich bin ein Hussiten!*

Wyclif and Hus represented a phenomenon taking place from the 14th Century and culminating in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. This was a revival of Augustinian theology, perhaps in reaction to the philosophically untenable Scholasticism of the Late Middle Ages. It is not that the theology of Augustine ever completely left the Church, but it was massively displaced by Thomas Aquinas, whose separation between Faith and Reason was carried *ad absurdum* by scholastics after him. A counter-reaction back toward the Platonism and Biblicism of Augustine began about a century after the death of Aquinas, through the teaching of an early Oxford theologian, Thomas Bradwardine (1290-1349). Bradwardine eventually occupied the Archbishopric of Canterbury, so it is evident that he was influential in his own day. Through him the University of Oxford not only developed into one of the premier reformist colleges in late medieval Europe, but with a strong Augustinian bent.

Wyclif was influenced by the teachings left behind by Bradwardine, and through Wyclif, Bradwardine's renewed Augustinianism passed on to Hus. In addition, through channels not so easy to determine, the various preachers and teachers within the Brethren of the Common Life also displayed a marked attraction to Augustine – though Erasmus seems to have escaped any such infection. Several late 15th Century Brethren, themselves precursors to the German and Swiss Reformers of the 16th Century, spoke in terms that were powerfully evangelical. Finally, the centrality of the doctrines of the *sovereignty of God* and of *justification by faith* were becoming the focal points around which true reformation might coalesce. John of Wesel (d. 1482, the year before Luther's birth) proclaimed the sole sufficiency of divine grace for man's salvation, "Whom God wishes to save he would save by giving him grace, if all the priests should

wish to damn and excommunicate him."[280] A contemporary with a very similar name, John of Wessel (d. 1489), flatly denied the power of good works toward salvation, in words that presage Luther's own struggle with Romans 1:17, "He who thinks to be justified through his own works does not know what it is to be just." Such teachings were gaining momentum in the latter half of the 15th Century, and constituted what Latourette calls a 'ground swell' of Augustinian theology, evangelical piety, and reformist activism that would carry Luther on its crest in 1517.

But there was one more component to this historical symphony of events, and one more indispensible contributor to a world that would foster and enable a true revolutionary Reformation. This was the *Technological* current or stream, and its source is found in but one invention, by one man: the **printing press** invented in 1439 by **Johannes Gutenberg**. A blacksmith and goldsmith by trade – and most certainly not an Augustinian theologian, itinerant preacher, or evangelical monk - Gutenberg made what may be justly considered *the* single most critical contribution to the Protestant Reformation, which took place a half century after his death. Without the moveable-type printing press, there would have been no vehicle by which Erasmus' satires and Luther's treatises could be widely disseminated across Europe. Moveable type enabled not only the wide circulation of a document, but also the circulation of many different translations of that document. Rome never quite figured this out, and consistently lagged behind the Protestants in the use of this modern technological wonder. Monkish scribes continued to labor to transcribe papal bulls and writs of excommunication. Meanwhile, Luther's pithy sayings and enervating vitriol were broadcast far and wide through moveable print. In a way, therefore, Johannes Gutenberg is the *real* founder of the Protestant Reformation.

Gutenberg (1395-1468)

[280] Quoted in Newman; 620.