

CHURCH HISTORY SESSION 3
The Christian Middle Ages
590-1517

INTRO: The middle ages began with on a distinctly negative note: the spread of the plague. The first great pandemic of bubonic plague was called the *Justinian Plague* of 541. It was named after Justinian I, the Roman emperor of the Byzantine Empire at the time. The epidemic originated in Ethiopia and spread to Egypt in 540. It then spread west to Alexandria and east to Gaza, Jerusalem and Antioch, then was carried on ships on the sea trading routes to both sides of the Mediterranean, arriving in Constantinople in the autumn of 541.

During the height of the plague, 5,000 to 10,000 people a day died. Outbreaks of the plague ravaged Europe over the next 200 years. The plague was one of the forces that helped to reshape Europe. The social and economic disruption caused by the pandemic marked the end of Roman rule and led to the birth of culturally distinctive societal groups that later formed the nations of medieval Europe.

The Middle Ages have also been called the "**Dark Ages**". The title refers to the perceived deterioration of society which occurred in Western Europe following the decline of the Roman Empire.

The term employs traditional light-versus-darkness imagery to contrast the era's "darkness" (lack of records) with earlier and later periods of "light" (abundance of records). The concept came to characterize the entire Middle Ages as a time of intellectual darkness between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance.

Having said all that, much transpired in the church during this period of transition in Europe.

- I. The first figure to take center stage was Gregory the Great
 - A. Gregory came into power at the transition between The Roman Empire and Christian Europe.
 1. In 590 Rome was becoming a ghost town due to floods, war and the plague.
 - a. Pope Pelagius II died of the plague, leaving the papal seat vacant.
 - b. It remained vacant for 6 months.
 - c. Finally the church leaders elected a monk by the name of Gregory to be the next pope.
 2. At first Gregory refused to take up the office, fleeing the city and hiding in the forest.
 - a. He was found and literally dragged back to Rome and installed.
 - b. On Sept. 3, 590 he was consecrated as the Pope.
 3. Gregory brought order to the church and the society at a time of chaos.
 4. Under Gregory the Church of Rome controlled extensive tracks of land in Italy and Sicily.
 - a. These lands are called the patrimony of St. Peter and cover 1,800 square miles.
 - b. The Church was the richest landowner in Italy.

4. When the Lombards invaded central Italy Gregory arranged for its defense and made peace with two Lombard leaders.

- a. The Lombards were a Germanic people who probably had their roots in Scandinavia.
- b. They ruled most of the Italian peninsula from 568-772

5. Because of Gregory the pope became an important political figure in European politics. He was called God's Consul.

B. Gregory magnified the authority of the papal chair.

1. He opposed John IV, patriarch of Constantinople when he took the title "Universal Bishop."

2. Gregory called himself "the servant of the servants of God."

3. Gregory didn't like titles but he claimed and exercised power over the whole church.

4. Gregory linked monasticism to the papal throne.

- a. He was a monk and never left that life behind.
- b. He surrounded himself with monks and made them bishops and legates.
- c. He confirmed the rule of St. Benedict.
- d. He guaranteed the property and liberty of the convent.

5. Gregory sent 40 monks to England to replant the church there, which they did.

6. It seems that Gregory probably codified a celibate priesthood because of his commitment to the monastic lifestyle.

a. Catholic historians claim that this had been the practice from the time of the Apostles, stating Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7:1,8.

1 Cor. 7:1

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.

1 Cor. 7:8

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.

b. Catholic historians point out that many in the early years who committed themselves to become priests, bishops and deacons left their wives for the celibate life. They seem to have missed Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7: 10-11

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. [11] But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

C. Gregory took seriously his calling to defend orthodoxy.

1. It seems to me that many of the practices we see as being Roman Catholic were codified by Gregory.

2. Gregory wed the official pronouncements of the councils and the teachings of the early Fathers with the common practices of the people of his day.

3. We are all affected by Adam's fall. In the fall our free will was damaged but not destroyed. Once we have received God's grace we can earn merit for ourselves by our good works.

4. All of a person's past sins are forgiven in baptism. Sin committed after baptism must be atoned for by acts of penance.

- a. Penance is a form of self-punishment.
- b. Penance consists of repentance, confession and meritorious works.
- c. Meritorious works must involve sacrifice or suffering. They include almsgiving, ascetic practices and prayer at all hours of the day. The greater the sin the more a person must do. No one knows if they have done enough until after their death. (works righteousness)

5. Gregory made praying to the saints central to Christian piety.

6. He also elevated holy relics as objects of spiritual power and protection. Relics could include hair, bones, toes, fingernails or clothes of saints and martyrs.

7. Gregory taught that those who die in an imperfect state go to purgatory to work off their sins.

- a. A person who is outside of the faith goes directly to hell.
- b. A person who is holy goes directly to heaven.
- c. The majority of people who believe in Christ go to purgatory.

8. Gregory elevated the Eucharist as the highest expression of God's grace.

- a. He taught that the elements actually become the body and blood of Jesus. This is called transubstantiation.
- b. The Eucharist is offered by the priest as a sacrifice for the sins of those participating.
- c. It could also be offered on behalf of those who have died. In this way some of that person's sins could be atoned for and their stay in purgatory shortened.

D. Gregory brought stability and order to the church in a time of chaos. He also codified practices that gave power to the church and were later abused.

II. Charlemagne and Christendom

A. On Christmas day 800 the Holy Roman Empire was reborn.

1. On that day Pope Leo III crowned Charles the Great, king of the Franks, as Emperor.
2. We are accustomed to the separation of church and state but that was not the norm in the Middle ages.

3. Charles the Great wed the Catholic Church with the Roman Empire and created Christendom.

B. A Transition in power

1. The power had shifted from the Roman Empire to the various barbaric kings.
 - a. Clovis united the Germanic peoples into the kingdom of the Franks.
2. This power further shifted to the landed aristocracy

3. The most powerful of the landowners was the Mayor of the Palace.
 - The office of mayor of the palace was an institution peculiar to the Franks.
 - A landowner who did not manage his own estate placed it in the hands of a steward (major), who superintended the working of the estate and collected its revenues.
 - If a land owner had several estates, he appointed a chief steward, who managed the whole of the estates and was called the major domus.
 - Each great personage had a major domus and since the royal house was called the palace, this officer took the name of mayor of the palace.
 - The mayor of the palace wielded great power in the royal court, even acting as the guardian for the King if the King was under age.
 4. Charles Martel solidified the power of the mayor of the palace.
 - a. Charles Martel was the grandfather of Charlemagne.
 - b. Although various kings still retained their thrones, Martel was the real power.
 - c. He was given the name Martel, which means The Hammer, because of his defeat of the Muslim invasion in 732.
 - d. Charles centralized the government of the Franks and was the ultimate ruler.
 5. His son Pepin the short, with the blessing of Pope Boniface, supplanted the Merovingian king and was crowned king in 751.
 6. Pepin became a protector of the pope and in 756 marched into Ravenna and displaced the Lombards. He gave the land to the pope. It was called the donation of Pepin. This made the pope a temporal ruler over the Papal States.
 7. This alliance between the Franks and the papacy shaped Europe.
 - a. It accelerated the separation between the Greek Church and the Roman Church.
 - b. It created the Papal States.
 - c. It gave the western kings religious sanction. "Divine Right of Kings"
- C. The Rebirth of the Holy Roman Empire.
1. When Charles the Great, Charlemagne, came to power he had three goals.
 - a. He wanted to establish military supremacy.
 - b. He wanted religious power to direct his people spiritually.
 - c. He wanted intellectual power to instruct his people.
 2. Charlemagne was an effective administrator.
 - a. He secured his southern border by establishing a frontier area in Spain, the Spanish Mark, to protect him from the Muslims.
 - b. He conquered the Bavarians and the Saxons.
 - c. He secured his eastern frontier by establishing the East Mark, which would become Austria.

d. He intervened in Italian politics when he defeated the Lombards and proclaimed himself their king.

3. Charlemagne was crowned Emperor by the Pope in 800.

4. This move caused friction between the papacy and the revived empire over the years.

5. The constant question was who had supreme authority? Should the church rule the state or the state rule the church?

6. During his reign Charlemagne held the balance of power.

a. All of Europe answered to him.

b. He instituted the kings' envoys to oversee local administrations. These consisted of two officials, a bishop and a lay noble. Even the pope was under their watchful eye.

c. He revived learning and the arts.

d. He restored law and order to Europe.

e. He extended Christianity throughout Europe.

f. The Holy Roman Empire that he established survived until 1806.

D. Feudalism

1. Feudalism was a form of political power that was exercised locally by individuals instead of a central government.

a. Three basic elements

b. Lordship and vassalage: a nobleman puts himself under a stronger nobleman.

c. The fief: land given to a vassal by the Lord to allow him to meet his obligations to the Lord.

d. The private exercise of government over vassals by the Lord.

2. A binding agreement was constituted between the vassal and the lord.

3. Because of the threats to the church, Bishops and Abbots became vassals in return for protection. This caused a conflict of interest.

4. The church did exert some positive influence on the feudal barons.

5. During the 11th century a conflict arose over investiture.

a. The spiritual authority of a bishop or abbot came from the church.

b. The civil authority came from the king or noble.

c. In practice the kings and nobles began to control who was appointed to these positions.

E. Church Renewal

1. The church needed to restore its autonomy.

2. A revival began within the reformed Benedictine order of Cluny.

a. They called for enforcement of clerical celibacy.

b. They called for the end of simony, the practice of buying and selling church offices.

- c. Their goal was to free the church from secular control and reassert the authority of the papacy.
 - d. This revival led to the establishment of the College of Cardinals in 1059, which took control of the election of popes.
3. The driving force behind the reform of the papacy was an arch-deacon named Hildebrand.
 - a. In 1073 he was elected Pope Gregory VII.
 - b. He claimed that the authority of the church superceded that of the state.
 - c. He officially prohibited investiture, threatening excommunication for those who continued in the practice.
 4. This caused a show down between Gregory and Emperor Henry IV.
 - a. In 1076 Henry tried to depose Gregory.
 - b. Gregory retaliated by excommunicating Henry and deposing him.
 - c. In 1077 Henry gave in under pressure from the German nobles and submitted himself to Gregory.
 5. The final word on lay investiture came at the Concordat of Worms. The church retained the authority to elect ecclesiastical officers but the emperor or his representative had to be present.
 6. It was under the papacy of Gregory VII that the infallibility of the pope was established.

III. The Ascension of the Papacy

A. Gothic Architecture

1. One of the most famous examples is Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.
2. Gothic architecture symbolized the focus of the church: lift, reach, aspire.
3. Gothic builders tried to attain the greatest height possible. Some cathedrals attained heights of 30 and 40 stories.
4. They wanted to give the illusion of soaring.
5. They also wanted to fill the interior with light. Gothic architecture introduced stained glass windows into cathedrals.

B. Consolidating the Pope's power

1. As the Holy Roman Empire began to divide up into national states the power of the emperor dwindled.
2. On the other hand the power of the pope increased. The papacy became the most powerful office in Europe.
3. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) solidified the exalted state of the papacy.
 - a. He was schooled in canon law and was an expert on church government.

b. He upheld the exalted view of the papacy; claiming a unique place between God and humanity.

c. He told the princes of Europe that the papacy was the sun and they were moons.

4. The pope's chief weapons to exert his power were spiritual penalties.

a. The threat of excommunication. A person could be deprived of salvation.

b. Interdiction: this removed God's grace from a whole nation. There could be no public worship and the sacraments were removed.

C. The Crusades

1. The Crusades was an unholy union between religious fervor and the desire for adventure and personal gain.

a. They lasted for 200 years.

b. The stated purpose was to expel the Muslims from the Holy Land and recapture it for Christendom.

c. They were instigated when in the 11th century Christian pilgrims began to encounter persecution from Muslims.

d. When the Turks captured the Eastern Empire the Pope was called upon for help.

2. Pope Urban II proclaimed the first crusade to regain the Holy Land in 1095.

3. The term crusade means "taking the cross".

a. When crusaders went toward the Holy Land they wore the cross on their front.

b. When they returned home they wore the cross on their back.

4. Urban promised the Crusaders full forgiveness of their past sins.

5. In the first crusade the knights went out of reverence for Christ and the Holy Land.

6. Urban proclaimed the crusades a Holy War, which opened the door to many atrocities.

7. There were seven major crusades. The first was the most successful.

8. It was during the Crusades that the practice of selling indulgences blossomed as a way for the church to raise money.

IV. The Rise of Scholasticism

A. Universities were born in cathedral schools.

1. The goal of these cathedral schools was two-fold

a. Reconcile Christian doctrine and human reason

b. Arrange the teachings of the church in an orderly system

2. The goal of scholasticism was to show the reasonableness of doctrines.

3. Originally learning was reserved for the clergy.

4. Charlemagne opened the door of learning to all through monastery schools.
5. Cathedral schools were the best opportunity for laymen to learn.
6. Their curriculum was limited to grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.
 - a. These were called the seven liberal arts.
 - b. This comes from the fact that in ancient Rome only freemen could study.
 - c. The world for freemen is “liberi”.
7. The Church Fathers, whose writings were studied, were called the authorities and their word was not to be questioned.

B. The Rise of Master teachers

1. The cathedral school system was changed by the emergence of gifted teachers. These teachers attracted students and changed the way learning was pursued.
2. The first was Gerbert, the master of the cathedral school at Rheims.
 - a. He challenged his students to go beyond the authorities.
 - b. He introduced the study of classical Roman literature in its original form.
3. Peter Abelrad stirred up the education system.
 - a. He introduced the idea that the key to wisdom is questioning.
 - b. His ideas earned him a one-way trip to the monastery.
 - c. A year later he secured his release.
 - d. He quickly gained a following of students who begged him to teach, which he did.
 - e. He ran afoul of Bernard of Clairvaux and ended his life in the abbey of Cluny.
4. Universities truly emerged when students and masters joined together in guilds.
 - a. They called themselves “universitas”, which is the word for any corporate group.
 - b. They did not have permanent quarters. They met wherever they could.
 - c. In addition to straight lectures, they used the method of disputation.
 - d. Students were taught to question, examine, and arrange details in a systematic way.
 - e. It was expected that their conclusions would square with Christian doctrine.

C. Papal Control of education

1. Scholasticism was allowed to develop under the watchful eye of the papacy.
2. The outcome was the formation of canon law and a systematic statement of Christian theology.
3. Canon law defined the rights, duties and powers of all people and priests within the church.
 - a. 1140 Gratian published a Harmony of Discordant Canons.
 - b. This became the foundation for the Body of Canon Law.

c. Canon Law prescribed fasting and feasting. It ordained that a person must observe confession and communion at least once a year. It detailed the conditions for excommunication. It also regulated the personal relations between a man and a woman.

d. Canon Law reduced human freedom to a minimum.

4. Canon Law gave the papacy a rational legal basis.

D. The Universities gave the papacy a rational theological construction for Christian society.

1. Thomas Aquinas became the point man for this quest.

2. He examined the Jewish and Muslim philosophies coming out of Paris.

3. The outcome was his Summa Theologica (a summation of theological knowledge)

4. Aquinas made a clear distinction between philosophy and theology.

a. The two were different but not enemies.

b. Both were pathways of knowledge that came from God.

c. Reason deals with the visible world and can lead to the “vestibule of faith”.

d. Revelation comes from God and is superior in its certainty and scope.

5. Aquinas taught that Christ won grace for humanity and the church imparts it.

a. A person needs a constant infusion of cooperating grace.

b. Saving grace comes to a person exclusively through the sacraments.

c. The keeper of the sacraments is the divinely appoint Roman Church led by the Pope.

6. Aquinas held to seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Lord’s Supper, penance, extreme unction, marriage and ordination.

7. The supreme sacrament was the Lord’s Supper.

a. By partaking in the Lord’s Supper God is predisposed to be gracious to you.

b. Aquinas held to transubstantiation.

c. The Lord’s Supper was seen as an actual sacrifice for the sins of those present.

8. The sacrament of penance is the sacrament of spiritual healing.

a. Penance consists of sorrow for sin, confession to a priest, and satisfaction.

9. Extreme unction is what was called the last rights or today the sacrament of the sick.

10. Aquinas also fostered the idea of a “treasury of merit”.

V. The Allure of Voluntary Poverty

A. The opulence and corruption of the church in the Middle Ages led to a call for Apostolic poverty.

B. This was met with stiff opposition and cries of heresy.

1. Heresy was defined as the denial of any revealed truth of the Christian faith.

- a. This included the unity of the church and the divine appointment of the pope.
2. These perceived heresies led to the use of force to quell the unrest.
3. Several men arose to question and stand in opposition to the church's affluence.
4. One of those men was Peter Waldo who led a "back to the Bible" movement.
 - a. Salvation was not by grace but by a life of penance and poverty.

C. Out of this battle arose the Dominicans.

1. Dominic was sent to preach among the heretics and turn them back to the church.
2. In order to reach his audience he chose a life of poverty.
3. He eventually began the Dominican Order.
 - a. They were a preaching order.
 - b. They were called mendicant meaning begging.
 - c. Their members were called friars or brothers to distinguish them from monks.
 - d. Monks were called to ministry in the countryside, friars in the towns.

D. The Inquisition

1. The inquisition was begun in 1184 under Pope Lucius III.
 - a. The purpose was to inquire about heretical beliefs.
 - b. The consequence was excommunication.
2. Under Innocent III the inquisition took new shape.
 - a. State punishment of heretics
 - b. Confiscation of property
 - c. Excommunication for those unwilling to move against heretics
 - d. Complete forgiveness of sins for those who cooperate.
3. In 1220 the inquisition was turned over to the Dominicans.
 - a. The heretic was left with no rights.
 - b. The inquisitor was subject only to the pope.
 - c. Trials were held in secret.
 - d. The accused had to prove his innocence.
4. In 1252 Pope Innocent IV authorized torture to gain information.
 - a. It was unlawful for a priest to take a life.
 - b. Once a person was determined to be a heretic he was turned over to the secular authorities for execution, usually by burning at the stake.

E. The Birth of the Franciscans

1. Founded by St. Francis of Assisi
2. He chose voluntary poverty and gathered a small group of like-minded men.

3. He established a simple rule for the brotherhood.
4. He appealed to Pope Innocent III for approval.
5. He called his band the Friars Minor.
6. Eventually as the movement grew he asked for assistance in administration.
7. Cardinal Ugolino was made his advisor.
8. This developed into the Franciscan order.

VI. The Rise of Reformers

A. John Wyclif

1. Born in northern England he was schooled at Oxford, received a doctorate there and became a prominent teacher.
2. The hot debate was what constituted dominion or lordship.
 - a. Some said that only dominion granted by the church was valid.
 - b. Others contended that secular rulers who were in a state of grace could have independent dominion.
 - c. Wyclif suggested that the state had the right to judge and correct the abuses of the church. The state could seize the property of corrupt churchmen.
 - d. In 1377 the pope condemned Wyclif for his ideas.
3. Wyclif foreshadows the reformers.
 - a. His dominion founded on grace was the precursor to Luther's justification by faith alone.
 - b. Each person stands on equal ground before God.
 - c. Each person has spiritual freedom.
 - d. The priesthood and sacraments are not necessary.
4. Wyclif believed that the pope should be the shepherd of the people and not a political leader.
5. Wyclif began to take a stand against the pope as an illegitimate head for the church.
6. Wyclif went from reformer to protestant.
 - a. He rejected most of the current practices of the church.
 - b. He held that the Bible alone is the supreme authority for the church.
7. He promoted the right of every person to study the scriptures for themselves.
8. He challenged the doctrine of transubstantiation.
9. He worked for the Bible to be translated into English.

B. John Hus

1. Hus was a Czech from southern Bohemia.
2. While studying in Prague he was introduced to Wyclif's teachings.
3. He accepted the idea that Christ, not the pope, is the head of the church.
4. He spoke against the pope's selling of indulgences.
5. He was marked as a heretic and burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

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