

Session Two: The Medieval Period

The Early Middle Ages (late 5th century through the Crusades (11th century +)

1. Chaos reigned in most of Europe because of various invasions from the North. The Angles and Saxons settled in portions of England. Most famous missionary from England to Ireland was **St. Patrick**.
2. Because of the pain and death and disorder, Christian worship began to turn from celebration to topics of sin and death and repentance. Communion evolved from a celebration to a somber service, where one was to think more of one's sins than of the victory of the Lord.
3. Even in the chaos, the Church became even stronger and more influential. **Monasticism** and the **papacy** played key roles. Most famous monk was **St. Benedict**, whose Benedictine Rule (529) set the tone for monasticism for centuries.
4. The title of "**pope**" is hard to trace in its origins. It means "papa," a term of endearment and respect, and was at first applied to any bishop who was beloved. It eventually became the exclusive title of the bishop of Rome, along with increased power and prestige. For example, **Leo the Great** (pope from 440-461) intervened in the Christological controversies of the day and also is reported to have stopped **Attila the Hun** practically at the gates of Rome. *Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) was very influential throughout Europe in that he stabilized and preserved Christianity in the Middle Ages through a new emphasis on monasticism.*
5. In 800, **Pope Leo III** crowned **Charlemagne**, king of the Franks, as Emperor. (Notice how the pope was now superior to the emperor.)
6. Papacy entered a period of rapid decline until 11th century.
7. Meanwhile in the East, the Roman Empire (now called the Byzantine Empire) continued for another 1,000 years. There the state was much more powerful than the church. The East is where most of the theological controversies (mostly over the nature of Christ) took place.
8. The final controversy (7th Ecumenical Council in 787) was over **images**, whether they should represent God in some way. For the most part, the East said no (at the Council) and the West said yes. *Still holds today.*
9. **Islam** arose as a new threat to the church. **Mohammed's** life spans most of the 7th century. He conquered almost all of Arabia. His followers continued his policy of military expansion. They conquered all of ancient Persia (the Middle East) and significant portions of the Roman Empire. Finally, *the Franks stopped the advance of Islam into Western Europe in the battle of Tours or Poitiers (732).* Charles Martel was king of the Franks.
10. After the reign of Charlemagne (about 800), chaos once again reigned and feudal lords began to spring up all over Europe. Each feudal lord had his own law, and there were endless battles among them.
11. The relationship between the Eastern Church and the Western Church became increasingly tense, until the **definitive rupture in 1054**. They broke communion with each other, ***an act which endures to this day!***

12. In the West, the much-needed reform came from monasticism. In their effort to rid the church of abuses, the program of reformation insisted on clerical celibacy, poverty and obedience (*still in effect today*).
13. The 11th century in turn produced conflicts between the Emperor and the Pope, especially over who had the right to appoint bishops (**investiture**).
14. This was also the time of the **Crusades** (began in 1095 and continued for centuries). They had many religious, as well as economic and political motivations. The most well-known reason was to regain the Holy Lands from the “infidel” Muslims. Bi-products were: the economies flourished through trade, money was once again the “coin of the realm,” intellectual ideas experienced a revival, great Gothic cathedrals were constructed, and the *bourgeoisie* arose—the “people from the city”, later known as the middle class of tradesmen and business people.
15. **The Renaissance** (15th century) was a movement originating mostly in Italy, emphasizing arts, letters, philosophy, antiquity, and the joys and pleasures of life. Again, most embraced it; but some saw it as worldly heresy.



From 1400 to 1600

I. The Early Reformers

1. The Catholic church was in chaos in the 1300s, with the king of France moving the papacy to Avignon for a time (“Babylonian Captivity”); the result was rival popes in Avignon and in Rome (“The Great Western Schism”) from 1378-1423. In grabs for power, more corruption followed.
2. They were finally settled through various councils in early 15th century, and there was an attempt at reformation of the church. Also a time of great construction.
3. In response to all this “schism,” the reformer/priest, **John Wycliffe** of England (late 1300s) gained attention by his protests against the RCC.
4. Wycliffe also was convinced that *the Bible should be translated into the language of the people*—done shortly after his death by his followers.
5. **John Huss** (1366-1415) was less radical than Wycliffe, but like him, believed that the church consisted of the elect and those who lived the Christian life. From Bohemia, Huss was burned at the stake after being reassured by the Catholic authorities that he had safe passage to a Council.

6. Another pietistic reformer was **Thomas a Kempis**, who wrote *The Imitation of Christ*. Many other examples of reformation occurred throughout Europe (e.g. William of Occam (early 14th). **Erasmus** of Rotterdam, a contemporary of Luther, was a Catholic theologian who advocated restoration by returning to simple New Testament Christianity. [sound familiar . . .?]
7. Still others in Europe sought reform by practicing mysticism, which allowed them to cultivate the spiritual life without having to deal with a corrupt church that was apparently incapable of reform.

II. **Meanwhile in the East . . .** [think eastern part of the old Roman Empire]

1. All through the Medieval period, the **Eastern Orthodox Church** (the official religion of the Byzantine Empire¹) continued to exist, although they grew progressively weak against various political foes.
2. The **Turks** overcame Constantinople in 1453. From that time on, the center of power in the EOC shifted from Greece/Turkey to Russia.
3. After the fall of Constantinople, many scholars fled to the West, taking with them important biblical and historical manuscripts, adding to the Renaissance.

III. **Two important events took place in the late 15th & 16th century: 1) the “discovery” and conquest of the Americas and 2) the Protestant Reformation.**

1. Rarely mentioned as a part of church history, it is important to note that within a hundred year period, the influence of Europe was spread throughout the world, and the Church was right in the middle of it.
2. Christianity grew dramatically, often by conquest more than conversion.
3. Conquest began in the West Indies and spread to Africa and Mexico and later South America. Most of the natives were destroyed or put into some form of slavery; often called “Indians.”
4. In the newly colonized lands, the Crown had the right to nominate bishops, who would run the churches. Naturally, the Crown selected supporters. Thus church and state worked closely together for mutual benefit. European expansion also included the continents of Africa and Asia.
5. At the same time, however, there were those in the church who dissented and protested, saying that the entire enterprise was evil and unchristian. Thus we turn to the Reformation period.



Yes, that's ol' Chris Columbus trying to talk King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella into taking three dinky ships halfway around the world to make them [and him] rich. The rest is history, they say.

¹ The Byzantine Empire is also known as the Eastern Roman Empire. The name comes from Byzantium, which was the ancient name for Constantinople, the capital city in the medieval period. The modern name for the city is Istanbul, capital city of Turkey.