

**Lecture III: The Golden Age of Medieval Christianity**

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**I. The Mendicant Orders**

- a. The era of the Crusades and the Middle Ages brought huge shifts in the economies of the West. A merchant class, middle class businesspeople, developed. This and other factors brought about a shift toward a monetary economy, as opposed to trade or barter system.
- b. This movement also led to wider gaps between the rich and the poor and led to the growth of cities and the migration of many people from the rural countryside into new cities.
- c. These shifts led to changes in the monastic orders of the West. Monastics opposed the new monetization of the economy and the changes that it brought on society.
- d. “Mendicants” are those who beg for a living.
- e. A key leader in what became the mendicant movement within monasticism was Peter Waldo, who was a French merchant. He heard about a monk who lived in extreme poverty as a spiritual practice – Waldo then adopted this lifestyle and began practicing a life of poverty and preaching. Waldo gathered followers, but the local archbishop forbade his activities. The Roman Church’s leadership did not like Waldo or those like him. Mendicants retreated into rural areas away from Roman persecution.
- f. The Franciscan movement began much like Waldo’s. Francis of Assisi was born into the merchant class and he embraced a life of poverty. Francis initially believed in simply serving God by living poorly and living in solitude. However, in 1209, Francis came to realize that he must also serve God by preaching about poverty and voluntary poverty. This led to monks living not in solitude, but in the new growing cities of the west where they could also serve the poor and the sick. Unlike Waldo, Francis was able to eventually get the support of the Vatican in his work.
- g. The Franciscan movement now had respect and the authority of the Pope and so the order grew. St. Claire, a friend of Francis, founded a new order for women. The growth and newfound respect worried Francis, because he thought humility was essential to monastic service. In his will, Francis forbade his followers from possessing anything or from requesting from the pope the weakening Francis’ *Rule*.
- h. Another major mendicant order of the era was Saint Dominic who was twelve years older than Francis. Dominic was also French and born to a wealthy and powerful family. He lived for a time as part of a Franciscan community, but did not like that the community did not retreat from the world. Dominic became obsessed with orthodoxy (meaning traditionalism, not the Eastern Church). The official name of the order that Dominic founded was the Order of Preachers and it was focused on education. Dominicans believed in a solid intellectual training.
- i. Dominicans saw “poverty as an argument that strengthened and facilitated their task of refuting heresy. Their main objection was preaching, teaching, and study, and poverty was seen as a means to that end (305).” They saw a lot of growth at universities – particularly at Oxford and in Paris. Dominicans also tried to convert Jews and Muslims (much of this was done by force).
- j. Franciscans also worked with students at universities and established a presence at the University of Paris.
- k. Shortly after Francis’ death, Pope Gregory IX ruled that the saint’s will was not binding and allowed the order to own property, although the titles of such property was held by the Pope.

## II. The Collapse of Medieval Civilization

- a. "The thirteenth century was the high point of medieval civilization."
  - i. The pope, Innocent III, gained more power than any other pope before
  - ii. Mendicant orders served the poor and brought a new spirit of service to the Church
  - iii. European universities grew and developed theological programs to train theologians and leaders
  - iv. Gothic art and architecture was at a high point.
- b. Beginning of the end:
  - i. The end of the Latin Empire of Constantinople in 1261
  - ii. Nationalism, war, plague, corruption, and invasion helped end things
- c. During the Middle Ages the nobles and very rich helped to keep strong monarchs in power because they protected their wealth and commercial interests. This eventually led to the emergence of England, France, and the Scandinavian countries during this era.
- d. Nationalism was a major factor during this time period. People had thought of themselves as only a member of a city or region until this time. Now regions became united into nations and their citizens aligned themselves with their new government.
- e. Nationalism and united nations in turn led to a threat to the pope's claim of universal authority.
- f. The major military conflict of the era was the Hundred Years' War (1337-1475) which was a war between France and England. The war involved much of Europe and is seen by some historians to be the first "European War."
- g. During the Hundred Years' War the most significant religious figure was Joan of Arc of France. She claimed to have visions from God that she must lead the armies of France to victory. She was eventually captured by the English and tried for heresy and burned alive. In 1920, Pope Benedict XV canonized Joan as a saint.
- h. During part of the war the pope resided in Avignon, France and the French exerted influence over the pope. This led the English to distrust the pope and cause a rift, which ended with the English Reformation.
- i. Another key event during this period was the Great Plague of 1347. The plague was also known as the Bubonic Plague and the Black Death. The disease was spread by fleas and rats which were able to spread the disease throughout Europe and the Middle East through the massive sea-based trading system that developed after the Crusades. "In three years the plague swept the entire continent, and decimated the population... a third of the population died." (327)
- j. The plague changed the economy of the West - markets were destroyed, unemployment rose, political chaos ensued, which further disrupted the economies. The plague also made many Christians question their faith and led to an increase in superstition and the worship of relics. The outbreak also led to persecution of European Jews by Christians who suspected that they had something to do with the disease.
- k. Constantinople suffered in this era, in part due to attacks by Muslim/Arab forces and the aftermath of Roman domination. They sought help from Rome, which demanded ecclesiastical reconciliation, which was accomplished with the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1439. The pope was unable to get western leaders to help Constantinople and the reconciliation was short lived. The patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria rejected the agreements of the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1443, and split from Constantinople ending the unity of the Eastern Church. Constantinople maintained its relationship with Rome and in 1452 the Roman mass was celebrated in Saint Sophia for the first time in four centuries. Despite this event, the city soon fell to Mohammed II on May 29, 1453.

### III. The Papacy under the Shadow of France

- a. The papacy changed a great deal following the election of Boniface VIII in 1294. His predecessor Celestine V had been a failure as a leader because he did not engage the leaders of the West – he “was unable to understand the duplicity and intrigues of those with whom he had to deal (330).”
- b. Celestine V tried to reform the Church through Franciscan simplicity, but Boniface tried to bring change through politics.
- c. One of the first significant acts by Boniface was in 1296 when he issued the *Clericis laicos* which forbade local clergy from giving any money to a secular power – effectively eliminating taxation of the Church.
- d. The papacy hit its high point in 1300 when Boniface declared a great year of jubilee, which, brought a large number of pilgrims to Rome. Boniface had promised plenary indulgence to all who visited St. Peter’s tomb – a great incentive.
- e. Boniface later expanded his power by claiming universal power (both ecclesiastical and political) with the *Unam Sanctam*.
- f. Some leaders rejected this claim and that forced Boniface to rely on the most severe power a pope has – the power of excommunication. The pope decided that he would excommunicate the king of France on September 8, 1300; however, the French learned of the plan and on September 7 kidnapped the pope.
- g. The French wished Boniface to abdicate, but he refused. He was eventually released, but humiliated and died quickly after returning to Rome.
- h. The next pope, Benedict XI, was a Dominican who has been described as pious and humble. He followed a policy of reconciliation and attempted to reach out to the King of France. However, the French would not accept this and attempted to judge Boniface posthumously, which threatened the idea of papal authority. Benedict was criticized by some for being too soft on the enemies of the pope and, at the same time, for being unwilling to compromise with the French. Benedict’s term as pope was short – he died after only one year in office in 1304.
- i. Benedict’s successor was elected through the work of French cardinals who wanted someone they knew would be friendly to France. Clement V ruled from 1305 to 1314 and never once visited Rome. Clement named 24 cardinals (23 of whom were French). He also appointed many of his relatives to leadership within the Church including to the position of cardinals.
- j. Clement V was the first in a line of popes who ruled from Avignon and so this became known as the Avignon Papacy or the Babylonian Captivity of the Church
- k. After Clement’s death the cardinals found it difficult to select a successor. They eventually elected an older pope in hopes that it would be a short rule. The new pope, John XXII, was seventy-two years old at his election, but ended up ruling for eighteen years (1316-1334). John instituted a system of ecclesiastical taxes, which was very unpopular among those who opposed his pro-French policies.
- l. The next pope, Benedict XII (1334-1342) built a great papal palace in Avignon and ordered that the papal archives be moved from the Vatican to his new palace.
- m. Gregory XI (1370-1378) was the next pope. He had become a cardinal at the age of 17 when his uncle Pope Clement VI appointed him to that position. It was during this time that Catherine of Siena came forward.
- n. Catherine of Siena was a member of Dominican religious community. She had a religious vision in which she was joined in a mystical marriage with Jesus and was ordered to serve others. She became known as a mystic and focused on living a contemplative life. At the time of Gregory’s election Catherine had another vision. This vision told her to ensure that the papacy was returned to Rome. However, for this to happen, the battles that were being fought

between the different city-states of Italy needed to end. Catherine went from city to city requesting that there be peace so that the pope could return.

- o. On January 17, 1377 Pope Gregory XI entered Rome and the Avignon Papacy came to an end. Catherine died three years later. A century later she was made a saint and in 1970 Pope Paul VI gave her the title of “doctor of the church.”
- p. The Avignon Papacy was wildly unpopular with everyone except the French. The Avignon lifestyle required a lot of money, so the popes taxed the faithful. The popes also sold ecclesiastical posts this practice became known as simony. Another wildly unpopular theme of this era was nepotism – the naming of relatives to positions of power and authority.

#### IV. The Great Western Schism

- a. Quickly after returning to Rome Gregory began considering returning to Avignon, but he died before he could carry out his plans. After long deliberations (debate) the cardinals chose an Italian archbishop to become pope. This pope became Urban VI on Easter Sunday, 1378.
- b. Urban VI was eager to “clean house” – to empty the Vatican of the corruption and nepotism of his predecessors. He declared that all of the bishops that were part of his “court” were traitors to Christ and that “a prelate receiving any gift whatsoever was guilty of simony and should therefore be excommunicated (338).”
- c. Urban VI appointed a large number of Italian cardinals, but he also appointed friends and relatives to positions of power.
- d. All of these actions angered many cardinals and other leaders of the church, so a large number of French cardinals and numerous Italian cardinals gathered in Anagni and declared that the election of Urban VI was not valid because they had been coerced.
- e. Urban responded by appointing twenty-six new cardinals. These new cardinals formed a new college of cardinals, while the cardinals who rejected Urban VI formed another college and elected their own pope, Clement VII.
- f. Once elected Clement sent armed forces to attack Urban in Rome. The attack failed and Clement then resided in Avignon.
- g. France and Scotland allied themselves with the Avignon Pope (Clement VII) while most of the rest of Europe including England, sided with Urban VI. When these popes died, others were elected to succeed them.
- h. There were many efforts at reconciliation but almost always the problem was the popes. They refused to give up power, which would have been the first step in any reconciliation. Eventually the two groups of cardinals stopped supporting their respective popes, leading to some reconciliation.