


Church History, Lesson 15 - The High Middle Ages

(This lesson is based on The Story of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez.)

Theological Activity... the rise of “Scholasticism”... (continued from last week)

- **Anselm of Canterbury** – Anselm spent most of his life exiled from Canterbury because of conflict with the civil authorities.
 - He elevated reason in his theological pursuits... For example...
 - Anselm expressed the reason for the incarnation in his treatise “Why God Human?”
 - This is well expressed by Justo Gonzalez in The Story of Christianity - *The importance of a crime is measured in terms of the one against whom it is committed. Therefore, a crime against God, sin, is infinite in its import. But, on the other hand, only a human being can offer satisfaction for human sin. This is obviously impossible, for human beings are finite, and cannot offer the infinite satisfaction for the sins of all humankind.* (page 313)
Anselm went on to state that only by the eternal, infinite Word becoming human could this dilemma be solved. Only a divine human could pay the infinite price required by human sin.
- **Peter Aberlard** – Peter Aberlard contributed to scholasticism by emphasizing “differences” in the conclusions of the Bible as well as theological writings of the past. His purpose was not to discredit the Bible or the church fathers, but to emphasize that theologians weren’t proving anything by just quoting an authoritative text. He challenged theologians to find ways to reconcile these theological variations.
- **Peter Lombard** – Peter Lombard contributed to scholasticism by writing a systematic theology titled Four Books of Sentences.
- **The Rise of Universities** was associated with the rise of cities which in turn was associated with a commerce economy.
- **Thomas Aquinas** – Thomas Aquinas decided to become a Dominican monk. His mother and brothers tried to dissuade him by locking him in the family castle for 1 year.
 - Eventually he became a leading theologian of the time. He contributed to Christian theology by showing that some theological truths are accessible through both reason and revelation, for example the existence of God.

Church Architecture – Have you ever wondered why European cathedrals are so grand?

- **Educational Purposes of Church Art** - In some ways, church buildings became the books that the illiterate of the Middle Ages could read. Many of them had stained glass, sculpture, and other works of art that took someone through not only the high points of the Bible, but also included some church history. In addition, there were visual arts the depicted heaven and hell. This allowed those who could not read have some understanding of redemptive history and Christian history.
- **The “Ritualistic” Purposes of Church Architecture** – Most Medieval Christians believe that the elements of communion became the literal body and blood of Christ, and consequently believed that every Sunday they experienced a miracle! In this system, the church building itself should reflect the grandeur of the miracle.
 - The lofty ceilings, stained glass, art, etc. developed a setting of mystery for that “miracle” in the minds of the people.
 - As architecture developed from Romanesque to Gothic, there was more space for windows and therefore more light could get in, and there was the ability to create higher ceilings. The affect made the impression that gravity had been overcome and even stones could be exalted to the very heavens.
 - However, some church structures didn’t provide enough support for the weight of the roofs and they collapsed, which may be an apt metaphor for the coming collapse in Europe.
- Finally, church architecture continued to be in the shape of a cross...  And this increasingly made a distinction between the clergy and the laity.

The collapse of European Medieval Catholicism –

Trade and Nationalism -

- The Crusades reopened trade routes, which led to a transition to a money economy led to the growth of cities and the growth of the “middle class” in those cities.
- This urban “middle class” wanted strong central governments because they were easier to deal with than feudal lords in their little minor kingdoms, so they supported strong monarchies all over Europe.

- This nationalism was part of what weakened the power of the church and the papacy because if the pope leaned toward one nation, others would see him as an opponent. This was certainly the case in the 100 Years War (1337 – 1475) between England and France. The pope lived in France for 70 of these years and was seen as an opponent by England. This set England up to be willing to resist the church and eventually led to Reformation in England.

The Black Plague - 1347

- The plague lasted for about 3 years and probably killed 1/3 of the population of Europe. Some villages were completely decimated. The economy of all Europe was disrupted.
- Every 10 or 12 years there would be another smaller outbreak. In these outbreaks, the young were particularly vulnerable because they had not built up the same immunities that the older survivors of the previous outbreaks had. Consequently, it seemed like the world didn't make any sense anymore. Death seemed to prefer the young.
 - This led to a morbid focus on death and preparing for it. People made pilgrimages to the Holy Land, the intellectuals began to question the ability of rational thought to understand the world and our existence, and the general population became very superstitious.
 - These superstitions led to the even greater veneration of religious relics.
 - Fear was everywhere.
- Jewish communities seemed to experience less effects from the plague. Some historians think that there were more cats in Jewish communities. Gentiles had come to think of cats as associated with witchcraft, but Jews did not. Rumors spread that Jews were causing the plague by poisoning wells, and the result was violence against and massacre of Jewish people.

For about 70 years, beginning in 1309, the pope resided in France and in many ways became a tool of the French government.

The Renaissance –

- The Renaissance represented a revival of classical learning, and a renewed interest in art.
- The popes spent much of their time in trying to expand their influence militarily or in seeking to aggrandize the church through works of art and architecture.
- Pope Nicholas V (1447 – 1455) tried to gain political dominance over other Italian states.
- Calixtus III (1455 – 1458) was a Spanish pope. He dreamed of becoming a great secular prince. He heaped honors on his grandson Rodrigo, who himself would become a pope. Calixtus spent more time on military campaigns than his “priestly duties”.
- Pius II (1458 – 1464) took his office seriously, but was unable to accomplish much in the way of reform.
- Paul II (1464 – 1471) collected art, jewelry, and silver. He loved luxury and openly kept concubines in the papal court. His pet project was the restoration of the ancient monuments of pagan Rome.
- Sixtus IV (1471 – 1484) bought the papacy by promising gifts to the cardinal college. His main project was to enrich his nephews. Consequently, he kept Italy in a constant state of warfare trying to acquire wealth on their behalf. He levied a heavy tax on wheat to pay for his wars and intrigues. Most of his misdeeds are forgotten because he is remembered for the Sistine Chapel which is named after him.
- Innocent VIII (1484 – 1492) willingly acknowledged his illegitimate children and heaped riches on them. During this time the sale of indulgences became big business. He also ordered that Christendom be purged of witches, consequently hundreds of innocent women were killed.
- Under Alexander VI (1492 – 1503) corruption in the church reached a new peak. One contemporary confirmed that people would say that he was willing to sell the keys (to the kingdom), the altars, and even Christ himself and that he was within his rights because he had bought them. Pius III wanted reform but he died after only 26 days.
- Julius II (1503 – 1513) took the name “Julius” to show that his model was not a Christian saint but a Roman Caesar. It was during his time that Michelangelo finished painting the Sistine Chapel and Raphael decorated the Vatican with frescoes. Julius’ favorite pastime was war and his contemporaries called him “the Terrible”.
- Leo X (1513 – 1521) had a great passion for the arts and his great dream was to finish the basilica of St. Peter.

NO WONDER THE PEOPLE WANTED CHANGE! AND GOD DID SEND A REFORMATION!!!