

## The Medieval Church

### Life in the Middle Ages

*Notes:*



### Is it the “Dark Ages?”

No. That is a pejorative term used by people in the Enlightenment to try to dismiss the entire Christian era. They claim that it is “dark” because it is in between the non-Christian (pagan) thinkers of Greece and the secular thinkers of the Enlightenment.

### Intellectual flourishing in the Medieval period.

- You got the invention of the university
  - University of Bologna (1088 – Italy)
  - University of Oxford (1096 – England)
  - University of Salamanca (1134 – Spain)
  - University of Paris (1160 – France)
  - University of Cambridge (1209 – England)



-You had incredible intellectual and artistic figures

- Geoffrey Chaucer
- Marco Polo
- Anselm
- Dante
- Thomas Aquinas
- Roger Bacon
- Peter Abelard
- Peter Lombard
- William of Ockham
- Albertus Magnus
- Chrétien de Troyes
- Geoffrey of Monmouth
- John Duns Scotus
- Et. Al.

### **Church services in the Middle Ages**

- Churches were the hospitals and schools of the day.
- You didn't own a Bible.
- The Bible was not translated into your native language.
- You learned to memorize the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, and the Nicene Creed in Latin, but you didn't really know what you were saying.
- There was a huge emphasis on religious relics. Relics were holy objects thought to bring grace, because they were associated with a godly person. A relic might be something like the skull of John the Baptist, nails from the cross, a piece of the burning bush, drops of Christ's blood, the spear that pierced Christ's side, or even breastmilk from the Virgin Mary.
- Most of the church service you'd kneel. Pews were not invented until the 15th century. But you would stand when gospel was being read.
- Men and women had to stay in separate places in the church either with the men up front and the women toward the back or the men on one side and the women on the other side.
- The main focus of the church services was the eucharist. You may only hear a sermon about four times a year.

- Stained glass may be the only imagery you'd ever see in your lifetime. We encounter more images in a day than the medieval villager would in his entire life!
- Stained glass was a way to teach illiterate people about the Bible as a type of medieval picture-book.



- The church was not in a great place spiritually in late the Middle Ages.

- Luther describes monasteries as lice-infested dens of homosexuality. Many monks had secret concubines and sexual liaisons with nuns. Even popes had mistresses.
- Around the year 1409 you had three men all claiming to be pope.
- There was a church in Europe that had an 8 year-old boy leading the parish.
- In some places in Germany only 1 in 14 churches had an actual pastor.
- In some churches in Switzerland priests hadn't even read the entire New Testament.

- The church and state were not separate.

## Major theological discussions in the Middle Ages

### 1. Grace and Effort

“Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam” (“God does not deny grace to the man who does what is in him”)

### 2. Intellectualism vs. Voluntarism

Does God declare an act good because his intellect sees that there is something intrinsically good about it (intellectualism) or is something good for the sole reason that God's will declares it to be good (voluntarism).

This is similar to something Plato discusses called the “Euthyphro Dilemma:” “Is the good loved by the gods because is good, or is it good because it is loved by the gods?”

### 3. Nominalism vs. Realism

#### 4. Mariology

- Developed rapidly by 590. Prayers for the saints began to be prayers to God *through* the saints.
- Because of the Nestorian controversy, she was called the “mother of God.”
- Clement, Jerome, and Tertullian ascribed perpetual virginity to her.
- Augustine had believed that she never committed any actual sin.
- By the 15<sup>th</sup> century she was seen as the head of all saints.
- Christians could venerate her (*dulia*) but not worship her (*latria*).
- She greatly contributed to the treasury of merit.
- She was declared by some Catholics to be a co-redemptrix.

"The title, 'Co-redemptrix,' refers to Mary's unique participation with and under her divine Son Jesus Christ, in the historic redemption of humanity. The prefix, 'co,' comes from the Latin 'cum,' which means 'with.' The title of Co-redemptrix applied to the Mother of Jesus never places Mary on a level of equality with Jesus Christ, the divine Lord of all, in the saving process of humanity's redemption. Rather, it denotes Mary's singular and unique sharing with her Son in the saving work of redemption for the human family. The Mother of Jesus participates in the redemptive work of her Savior Son, who alone could reconcile humanity with the Father in his glorious divinity and humanity." -Mark Maravalle, Catholic Theologian



#### 5. Sacramentalism

The seven sacraments of the Catholic Church

Baptism  
Confirmation  
Communion  
Holy Orders  
Marriage  
Penance (reconciliation)  
Final Unction

Theological development especially happened in the case of transubstantiation.

“The bread and the wine which are placed on the altar are, after consecration, not only a sacrament but the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that these are sensibly handled and broken by the hands of priests and crushed by the teeth of the faithful, not only sacramentally but in reality.” –Berengar of Tours (999-1088)

Pope Alexander III, in 1140, coined the phrase “transubstantiation” to refer to what happened at communion. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council made transubstantiation official church doctrine.

“Hoc Est Corpus Meum.”

## 6. Scholasticism

“The attempt to rationalize theology in order to buttress faith by reason.” -Earle Cairns

This is especially the case with Aristotle. Instead of merely believing something because the Bible said so, the medieval wanted to debate the issue, think through all sides, consider objections, and create a philosophical method for defining and defending faith.

The most common systematic theology textbook (and really the first book that can be called a systematic theology in church history) was Peter Lombard’s *Four Books of Sentences*. It was the most commented on book in the Middle Ages after the Bible. The most read book in the Middle Ages (after the Bible) was *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius

## 7. Philosophical defenses for the existence of God.

“Because effects always depend on some cause, and a cause must exist if its effect exists...It is therefore impossible that, in the same manner and in the same way, anything should be both the one which effects a change and the one that is changed...*We do not find that anything is the efficient cause of itself.* Nor is this possible, for the thing would then be prior to itself, which is impossible.” –Thomas Aquinas

“If that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought of as not existing, this very

thing than which a greater cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. But this is contradictory...But how did he [the fool who denies God's existence] manage to say in his heart what he could not think? Or how is it that he was unable to think what he said in his heart?" – St. Anselm

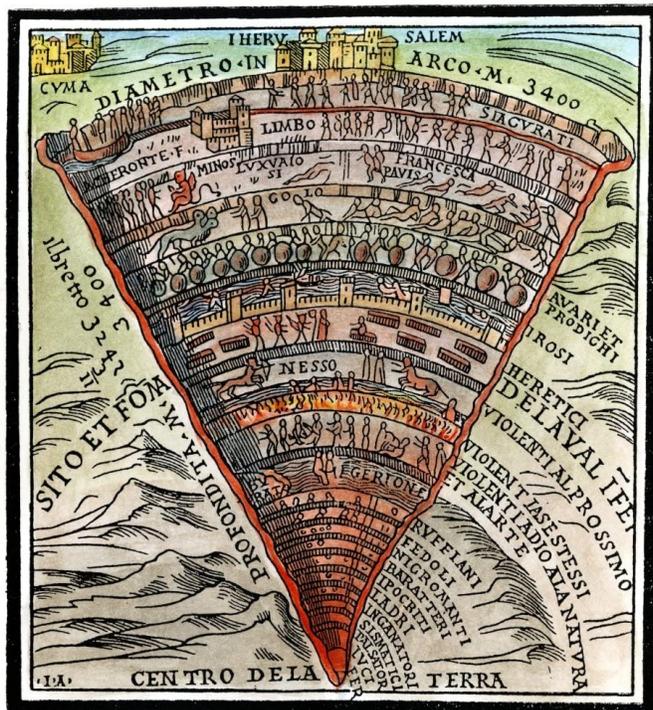
## 8. The popularization of the fear of hell

### Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*

In Dante's *Inferno* he describes Hell as having 9 levels (circles)

1. Includes moral pagans and unbaptized Christians. It is limbo. It's not really Hell yet but people wander around in loneliness.
2. Lust – People are blown in a continual wind storm
3. Gluttony – People are freezing in a continual icy rain
4. Greed – People are forced to push big boulders around
5. Anger – People are engaged in an endless battle in a swamp
6. Heresy – People are burned forever in stone coffins
7. Violence – People are made to drown in a lake of boiling blood
8. Fraud – People are endlessly tortured by being beaten by demons
9. Treachery - Is a vast frozen lake where the devil resides with the worst sinners (like Judas).

Many of these levels are based on Dante's idea of "The Seven Deadly Sins": pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth



John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

At once as far as Angels ken he views  
The dismal Situation waste and wilde,  
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe,  
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes  
That comes to all; but torture without end  
Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed  
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:  
Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd  
For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd  
In utter darkness, and thir portion set  
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n  
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.  
O how unlike the place from whence they fell!  
-Satan's First Impression of Hell, *Paradise Lost*

9. Interpreting the Bible through a four-fold understanding called the *quadriga*

Four Senses for what the city Jerusalem stands for:

Literal – a plot of ground in Palestine  
Allegorical (relates to the new work of Christ) – The Christian Church  
Moral (also called tropological) – The Human Soul  
Anagogical (heavenly) – The heavenly city, New Jerusalem

Four senses for the story of David and Goliath

Literal – David historically killed this warrior from Gath.  
Allegorical – Jesus destroyed the devil on the cross.  
Moral – We, like David, should trust God and battle against sin.  
Anagogical – Good ultimately triumphs over evil when Christ returns.

An example of the good Samaritan from Augustine:

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; Adam himself is meant; Jerusalem is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; Jericho means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies. Thieves are the devil and his angels. Who stripped him, namely; of his immortality; and beat him, by persuading him to sin; and left him half-dead, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called half-dead. The priest and the Levite who saw him and passed by,

signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament which could profit nothing for salvation. Samaritan means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin. Oil is the comfort of good hope; wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit. The beast is the flesh in which He deigned to come to us. The being set upon the beast is belief in the incarnation of Christ. The inn is the Church, where travelers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed after pilgrimage. The morrow is after the resurrection of the Lord. The two pence are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come. The innkeeper is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him "to live by the gospel."