



An Introduction to Medieval Thought

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I. Defining the Middle Ages

Traditionally, the Middle Ages in European history, has been designated as the time period that began after the fall of the Roman Empire, c. 476 ACE and extending through the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Our cutoff date will be February 23, 1403, the day the Visconti of Milan died just before invading Florence giving the Florentines the notion that they were divinely chosen to lead the world culturally.

This notion of a Medieval or “Middle” Age is a demeaning denomination. Certainly those who lived through this period thought they were living in contemporary time, and not in the middle between two more illustrious ages. If they thought of themselves as being in the middle of anything it was in the midst of the “great wheel of fortune”, the eternal circling of the stars and planets and that they were in the middle of the everlasting drama of salvation, poised precariously between heaven and hell. More likely they were in the middle of a field behind an ox or horse pulling a wooden plow with no idea what era they were in.

The “Middle Ages” was coined by self-important 18th century chronologists who saw the medieval period as a static bridge period between the glorious accomplishments of the ancient Greek and Roman era and their own modern progressive “Enlightened” era having its proto-scientific and artistic invitation in the Renaissance and carried to the full-glory of the modern Absolute Monarchies and Nation States in the 17th and 18th centuries.

What’s worse, the Enlightenment historians tended to portray the period as the “Dark Ages”. A cultural devolution from the Empire of Rome, one of illiteracy, superstition, ignorance, brutality, torture and credulity. Even the term “Gothic” was an enlightenment slur against Medieval culture, art and architecture, labeling it as the product of Goths, one of the Northern “barbarian” tribes that brought Rome to its knees.

While retaining the designation “Medieval” we will try to rescue the era from its Enlightenment detractors, pointing out its genuine achievements and advancement both culturally and intellectually. On the other hand, we will want to rescue the era from its friends as well. We must become aware of the dangers of Western triumphalism and the progressive theory of history. We must understand the medieval period as one of dynamic interaction between Western Europe and other more culturally advanced tradition such as the Byzantine, the Arab, the Andalusian Muslims and Jews. Often the period has been romanticized (c.f. the novels of 19th century author Sir Walter Scott and the Arthurian legends). Described as an era of faith, of social order, of chivalry and crusader idealism; it is up to us to temper this gauzy view with the facts concerning religious dissent, and persecution, class conflict, plague, poverty, suppression of philosophy and theology and medieval warfare and genocidal policies.

Philosophers, theologians and historians have tended to concentrate on the ethical, spiritual and political aspirations of aristocratic men of European dissent. In consequence we’ve inherited the myopic view, which excludes the voices of the majority population: the non-European, the non-Christian, the worker, the serf and peasant and most notably, the voices of medieval women. Classic history presents a “man’s world” and not every man at that. We must try to make up for the deficit hearing the rich contribution of heretofore neglected voices.

In this session, we'll trace the highlights of the medieval period. We'll indicate the technological advances that led to the recovery of the wealth lost after the Fall of Rome and after the invasions of the Norsemen and other Germanic tribes. We'll compare the principal tenets of the four major religious traditions extant during the Medieval period: Roman Catholicism, Byzantine Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

II. Ethics and Political Theory

After the sack of Rome by Alaric the Visigoth, the Roman Empire that stretched from Great Britain to the Northern Coast of Africa steadily declined. Franks, Huns, Goths, Visigoths, and other Germanic tribes invaded the Empire from every direction. Since the Edict of Milan in 313 ACE under Constantine's order Christian persecutions in Rome were ended and Christianity grew in an unsteady alliance with Roman paganism. The invading Germanic tribes took centuries before they were fully converted to Christianity both by Benedictine proselytization, Charlemagne's wars and forced conversions (c. 800 ACE). Even under Charlemagne the post Roman era never reached the extent of the Roman Empire. Ireland and Scotland remained out of its orb; the Byzantine's controlled Greece and Turkey; the North Coast of Africa and Andalusian (Southern) Spain were dominated by a highly advanced Muslim civilization; and Arabs controlled Turkey, Jordan, Spain, Syria and Palestine.

After the breakup of the Empire, Europe devolved into a complex system of landowning called feudalism. This was primarily a political system of subservience based on carefully stated obligations. Arable land was held in large tracts principally by warlords, although Abbots controlled church lands. Land divisions between sons of the lord were frequent until primogeniture (restriction of land inheritance to the first born son) was introduced. Other men, trained from youth in military arts became vassals to the lord through a knightly ceremony. This involved swearing allegiance whereupon the lord would grant the knight or chevalier (horseman) a fief. In turn the knight pledged to defend the lord or king militarily, providing him with foot soldiers, war supplies and the promise of ransom in case the lord or king was captured in battle. Women, if widowed, would occasionally inherit fiefs and some became renown for their administrative skills and fortitude. For the most part, a double standard prevailed during the medieval period, where noble women's education, property rights, mobility were curtailed and civil rights were suppressed and their lives controlled by father, uncle, husbands, priests, bishops, ie. by men. We will see however that this societal situation did not prevent women from making contributions to art, literature music and philosophy during the Middle Ages.

While the activities of aristocrats and knights were largely focused on the defense and enlargement of the fiefs through warfare, grants or intermarriage, the peasants and serfs carried out the agricultural work. Their lives, it might be argued, were better than those of Roman slaves, but not by much. Allegedly exempted from military duties, they were often exploited and abused by the knights who were sworn to protect them.

Often we think of medieval times in Europe as a period of fervent Christian faith. Indeed the Christian cosmic paradigm poetically portrayed by Dante Allighieri will be featured in the course. However, Medieval culture borrowed heavily from the Diaspora Jews who settled in England, Germany, France, Italy and most productively in Andalusian Spain. Christian Europe was in constant contact with the Byzantine Eastern Empire and imported many trade goods, technologies, scientific and literary contribution from the Muslim East. In fact a thriving Muslim civilization had established itself in Southern Spain, until Christians conquered Granada in 1492. The era has a checkered pattern of peace and tolerance, mutual exploitations and vicious persecutions, programs and holy wars. Paranoia, panic, hatred and irrationalism uneasily coexisted with faith, charity, rational theology, chivalry and philosophical disputation, just as Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities uneasily coexisted in parts of Europe.

The predominant ethical paradigms in Christian Europe were those of the Knight or nobility, the saint (or clergy) and the Sage, the middle class guildsman engaged in trade, commerce, or

administration. Attempts to reorganize the Europe under a single emperor after the model of the Roman Empire were largely failures. The dreams of Charlemagne and Otto II were largely flops. For example, Italy wasn't unified until deep into the 19th century. Throughout the Middle Ages, the boundaries of principalities and monarchies shifted and broke apart rapidly as the history of the One Hundred Year War between England and France (1337 – 1453). Subsequently, the most centrally organized European institution was the Roman Catholic Church.

Centered on a papacy in Rome, recipient of tribute from every diocese in Europe, the Church infused a cosmic meaning in every congregant from peasant to manorial lord and lady. The lifespan from birth, puberty, marriage, vocation, property dealings, warfare, and death was accompanied by sacramental ritual. The hours, days, and seasons followed a liturgical calendar replete with feast days and fasts associated with the passion of Jesus of Nazareth and the lives of Christian saints and martyrs.

Lay architecture was largely pragmatic, the result of defense needs for strong battlements, towers, moats, and crenulations as bulwarks against Norsemen and other barbarian invaders as well as Christian warlords with an eye on rival fiefdoms. The Churches were for centuries the patrons of art, music, and architecture as towering Romanesque churches announced the centrality of an all-powerful God and the Old and New testament could be taught to a predominately illiterate population through the uses of story-telling friezes, carvings, paintings, mosaics, by a predominantly illiterate clergy.

Massively influenced by the more advanced Byzantine artists, the Western European artists adopted the otherworldly, transcendent and horror (awe) inspiring Byzantine style.

The more harmonious, graphically realistic and naturalistic styles of the Greek and Romans fell out of fashion. What appears to contemporary eyes as a loss of realistic or naturalistic technique (rediscovered allegedly in the Renaissance) was really a shift in taste from a more this worldly to an otherworldly style of depiction.

The man or woman raised in Medieval Europe and taught Old and New Testament stories would see themselves in a three-tiered universe, the edge of which was clearly visible. The globe of earth stood in the middle surrounded by the celestial spheres. The Glassine (aethereal) sphere of the fixed stars (constellations) revolved around the planets and the earth every 24 hours (at incalculable speed). There abided the hierarchy of angels from archangels to Cherubin and Seraphin. Above that was the empyrean heaven, abode of the saints, martyrs, the Virgin Mary, the Risen Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father. Beneath the sphere of the moon, the endless drama of salvation took place. Occupying a central link in the Great Chain of being was the human being, half earth bound body and half heaven bound spirit. Man struggled with this destiny torn by temptations to perdition and the promise of eternal salvation. On the other side of the earth, as yet undiscovered stood the seven-story mountain or purgatory, where those who were repentant suffered for the remission of their sins. Beneath their feet in the depths of the earth sank the nine circles of hells, where the unrepentant suffered eternal torture and damnation.

Naturally there was a great desire to find a portal to heaven, which inspired pilgrimage to the tombs of saints and martyrs to the Holy Land and Jerusalem and to the Church's, which housed relics; which were seen as touchstones of Divinity and morality. The scandal of having the Holy Land in the hands of Arabs precipitated the crusades, which combined a knight's love of slaughter with the pilgrimage. The papacy was also a portal to eternity since the pope was understood as a successor to the Apostle Peter who was martyred in Rome. The church of St. Peter in Rome housed Peter's tomb and the words of Jesus: "Upon this rock (Petrus) I will build my church" was literally understood to mean that Peter (Petrus) was the first Pope (i/Papa, father) of the Church and the Cathedral of St. Peter's was the church Christ intended to build over Peter's bones. "Whatsoever you loose on earth, is loosed in Heaven and whatever you hold fast on earth is held fast in heaven". Those words spoken then to Peter were officially interpreted to mean that the pope had the power to exonerate sins, not only to forgive them, but rather to release a person from the punishment assigned those sins in purgatory. Such was the

power of the papacy.

When the crusades failed to secure the Holy Land for Western Christians, the doctrine of transubstantiation was pronounced making every parish church a place of divine/corporal transaction and a new portal to eternity.

Feudal warfare mistreatment of peasants and serfs, periodic famine, pandemic diseases, persecutions, threats (real and imagined) from foreign traditions and cultures made life in the Medieval Europe a precarious one. Natural, economic and political disasters were often blamed on the infidels within and the lack of devotion of the faithful. Strict ascetic codes of conduct were prescribed by the emergent monastic orders; Benedictine, Dominican and Franciscan. Often popular because of the contrast of these orders with the officialdom of the Church, often consisting of noblemen, the strict rule of these orders wore thin on their members and ribald tales of less than ascetic monks abounded. In consort with Feudalism and the use of marriage as a means of joining fiefdoms and enlarging dynasties, the Church counseled arranged marriages. Romantic love between knight and wife or the Nobleman and lady was discouraged. Reproduction was made a duty. "Better to marry than to burn". Relations were much more natural and simpler among the peasants.

Women were marriageable right after puberty, marriage arrangements were made while they were in infancy; they were wed at the age of twelve or fourteen to men in their twenties and thirties. The arrangements were often loveless political unions, certainly abusive by contemporary standards and conducive of great gaps in learning and maturity between wives and husbands. Many Medieval couples grew to love one another deeply and devotedly but often the relationships were cruel, abusive, or alienated. Lower class women and children fared even worse.

Three movements throughout the Middle Ages addressed male and female relationships. One was the devotion to the Virgin Mary. Mary worship brought a feminine peace-loving softer style to Christianity. Every time a pope called for a crusade, Mary worship flourished suggesting a counter-peace movement against the bloodthirstiness of sending men to war. Mary staged the condemnatory hand and arm of Christ. Her intercession, her nurturance, her loveliness was adored over Europe, to a point where sermons on the Father were rare.

Another movement was the code of chivalry. Deriving from the Arthurian legends, celebrated by the knight, philosopher, theologian Ramon Lull, the code was designed to make a murderous brute acceptable at court. From squire to knight a steady dose of armed swordplay, jousting and hunting made the military man a crusty mate for a fourteen-year-old noble woman. Chivalry taught gentleness, courtesy, refinement, music, poetry and duty to protect women, the clergy, the poor, and the widow. This, as well as devoutness, courage, intrepidity, adventurousness and loyalty to one's king were expected of the true knight.

In conjunction with Chivalry, a tradition of Courtly Love evolved. Traceable to the sensual and romantic poetry of Muslim Andalusia, encouraged at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204), daughter of Duke William IX, the knight and Troubadour of Poitiers and her daughter Marie de Champagne, courtly love involved the love of a knight for another man's wife. Allegedly pure and chaste from afar, such a love was designed to galvanize the knight to perform great deeds militarily (for example, slaying a dragon, saving a damsel in distress, or killing a Sorcerer on crusade), in order to win the love and devotion of the lady who champions him (see *De Amore, A Treatise on Courtly Love*, by Andreas Cappellanus, 1184).

As opposed to legend, husbands not at all approved of courtly love since it often led to their cuckolding and to the death and/or banishment of both lover and wife. It also frequently ended in rape. However, the literature of Romance reveals both the conflicted nature of sexual and marital relations in the Middle Ages, the misogyny of the times, and the underlying truth that the middle ages was much more lusty and sensual than we customarily believe.

Ethically, Medieval Philosophers and Theologians ran into the problem that the New Testament does not offer a coherent moral system. Judaism rectified this problem by supplementing the Torah with the Talmud, a compendious set of moral guidelines for every contingency. Perhaps the Christian disciples ignored the need for a political structure, a legal

and judicial system and a coherent moral code because they believed that the apocalypse would occur in their lifetime. During the forbidden invasions, the notion of an earthly Christendom was considered a distant, improbable possibility. But after the conversion of the Goths, Huns, Franks, and Lombards, the stemming of the Muslim advance in Europe by Martel and the waning of the Viking invasions, European Christianity settled into permanency and stagnancy so that the idea of earthly Christendom was realized. In the absence of a worked out basis for an ethical and legal basis, philosophers like Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas turned to ancient sources in Greece and Rome. Augustine's City of God is a type of Christianized Platonism incorporating Plato's Republic as a model for a Christian presence in a pagan Rome.

Aquinas, inspired by the translations of his teacher, Albertus Magnus and the Muslim commentaries of Averroes and Ibn Sina on Aristotle's texts, offers a Christianized Aristotelianism to Western university students. The Aristotelian virtues of Wisdom, Justice, Moderation and Courage are augmented by the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. The Aristotelian Ptolemaic Geo-Century Universe is combined with Diogenes the Aetolian's Hierarchy of the Angels and the road to hell is paved with Aristotle's categories of human vices. Aquinas offers a theory of law wherein four interesting stages of law are situated. Civil law (e.g. the fair price of broadcloth) is justified by the higher natural law (e.g. Fairness promotes friendship, trust or community) which in turn is founded on Divine Law (Thou shall not steal! Cheaters find themselves confined to the 8th circle of hell because of the perversion of the Divine gift of reason which makes a person a human being rather than a snake), which is beholden to Eternal Law (Character, like water, seeks its level; Equals should be treated equally, unequals unequally; Something is identical within itself). Interestingly Aquinas draws the conclusion that a Monarch cannot order his subjects to trespass against the natural or the Divine Law. He goes so far as to say that if a Monarch becomes tyrannical in violation of his obligations to the common good, then he may morally and legally be deposed. He stops short of regicide and allowing only aristocrats the right of revolution, and requires the speedy restoration of a legitimate successor; but he rejects the notion of an Absolute Monarchy. This political liberalism, with its implied restricted notion of political rights took root in England, rather than in continental Europe.

III. Faith and Reason

In this section we will examine the medieval thought on the issues of Faith and Reason. The three major European religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity dealt with these issues. All three monotheisms inherited scriptural revelation. As Europeans however, each transacted with the philosophical traditions of Ancient Greece and Rome. Since Christianity claimed to trump or to sublimate the Old Testament and the Moslem believers claimed to trump or sublimate the Old and New Testament through the Koran, the task of the cathedral schools and universities was to, on the one hand, prove monotheism to polytheistic pagans, and on the other, to prove the tenets of their religion as superior over that of the rival infidels. Since scriptures were precisely the bone of contention, the avenue of persuasion became philosophy the attempt to establish religious truths on the basis of reason and evidence independently of revelation.

Augustine

The North African Bishop, Augustine of Hippo, a Roman citizen, rejected the Persian religion of Manicheism in favor of Christianity. His reason told him that the way to avoid natural and moral evil was not to avoid bad company with the evil eye, or places soaking in the juice of evil, or evil amulets or demonic haunts. Evil was not, in opposition to the Manicheans, a positive substance. He thought in the manner of Christians that evil was an absence of being. God's creation was infinitely good, but the limits of things constitutes the evil. The volcano is neutral, its lava a good that makes hills and valleys. But it's counted a physical evil because it places a limit on the lives living in its path. Cancerous tumors are not evil in themselves; they

only limit the normal functioning of healthy cells and organs. As for moral evil, the items the thieves steal are good for the thief to have, but the evil comes from depriving them from the rightful owner. Evil is a lack of being. The thief is evil, not because he has become infected with an evil substance (cursed so to speak), but rather is lacking in character, a failed human being. So all of creation is good and would be perfect if we could overcome all limitations.

Augustine, however, does not believe that it is within human power to overcome a central flaw in human nature, inherited from the Fall of Adam. People, you and I, are in love with sin; we sin for its own sake not for the sake of goods. Even when no self-interests are served, we sin. We sin in open defiance of God's love because we love ourselves in His place. The secret joy of sinning is the joy of self-serving pride.

As a student of Plato, Augustine learns that a human being can flourish by overcoming all vice with the rational knowledge that no vice enhances the human good and by adopting wisdom, justice, moderation and courage. Plato's political view is that an aristocracy of men and women who have achieved a magnanimous psyche would rule the state justly by virtue of their superior moral character. Augustine's view is that even Plato recognized that the finest characters are most vulnerable to flattery and self-betrayal. This Augustine thinks is due to our love of sin for sinning sake, a deep perversion in our will, which is so strong that no other earthly value can override it. The State is doomed to corruption, for no one can resist the temptation for exploitation and conscience that the power and money of public office provide. Only God can save us.

Thus, philosophy and the council of reason will fail us without faith in the revealed word of God. Humans cannot save themselves, only by the unearned mysterious Grace of God, can humans achieve sainthood and consequent heavenly immortality. Only a City of God, consisting of true believers existing within the corrupt City of Man, can achieve justice and hope.

The Augustinian doctrine of Grace was returned to by Renaissance Protestant religious reformers. Reacting to the sale of indulgences for the remission of sin by the official Church, Calvin and Luther posited that good works (human efforts) are powerless to merit salvation, rather only the miraculous Grace of God can rescue you.

We can see for Augustine that reason is effective in refuting other religious traditions while helpless in explaining the ways of God apart from revelation.

Anselm, Aeveroes, Maimonides and Aquinas

These philosophers/theologians hail from the three religious traditions of the Middle Ages. Each believed that the fundamental tenets of their monotheisms that an omnipotent creator/ God exists were provable by reason and not by faith alone. Each positive argument for the existence of God designed to demonstrate the falsity of atheistic, pantheistic and polytheistic proponents. By so doing, these theologians endorsed the exercise of reason, logic and philosophy as a legitimate occupation for believers; and subsequently preserved the teaching of Plato, Aristotle and other pagan philosophers in their respective educational institutions. Notably Aquinas protected the right of the Latin Aeveroists to teach at the University of Paris.

We will explore the Almohad Creed, the Ontological Argument, the arguments from motion, causation, contingency, design and goodness. Thus we will make ourselves aware of the lively theological debates and disputations in an era, which admittedly also experienced periodical condemnation of thoughts, heresy trials, executions and suppression of independent thought.

Finally, we will review the nominalist challenge to rationalism proposed by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. These theologians denied the objective existence of universals. Only individual things exist. Steve Mayo and Mike Russo exist, but not human beings or lunkheads. Such generalizations as "human beings" or "lunkheads" are just figments of our imagination, mere words. Now nominalism, the theory that only concrete individuals exist and general terms stand for nothing, makes havoc of our sciences. Basically what our reason tells us is true out there, how we categorize and sort the things of the world into kinds, types, and species,

are really bogus imaginings. Thus reason is useless. It cannot tell us about the world or prove God's existence. Only God knows the truth of the World. We know about Him because he reveals Himself to us. So forget philosophy and read the Bible.

We discover here the seeds of Christian fundamentalism. The Roman Catholic Church will say that scripture needs its (the Church's) authoritative interpretation whereas protestant reformers will claim that the only authority is the Word of God itself.

IV. Just War Theory

Here we will explore two competing moral theories promulgated during medieval times. 1) Just War Theory and 2) the crusader ideal: Holy War. Just War Theory we will see in the writings of St. Ambrose and later the more systematically worked out premises of Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theological. We will find the Church's attempt to mitigate the violence of feudal warfare through two edicts The Truce of God and the Peace of God. There will be clear connections to the Chivalric Code of Conduct.

On the other hand, we will examine the transformation of a basically pacifist Christianity into a justification for the Crusades, or the European invasion of Palestine. We will trace the origin of Christian Holy War from the writing of Pope Gregory the Great and Pope Urban II. We will follow the course of the six medieval crusades and examine the accompanying pogroms and persecutions of European Jews, leading up to their expulsion from England, France, Germany and Spain.

We will examine the crusading zeal of St. Bernard, a charismatic Mariologist with a passionate militancy. We will explore the anomaly of a Western crusade against Byzantium, a Christian culture.

We will then put the Just War Theory in action to see whether the presumed Saracen (Moslem) threat to Christendom justified the crusader's repeated invasion of the Holy Land. Here we will examine the Koranic Just War Theory (Jihad).

Finally, we will survey the conflict between England and France over dynastic control and the consequent One-Hundred Years War. The question again is whether the monarchs and knights conducting the war remained within the ethical guidelines of Just War Theory.

V. The Broken Image: Challenges to Medievalism

The Middle Ages are frequently described as a period of monolithic Christianity, of unquestioning faith, of political and economic stagnation. Certainly these are gross distortions if not outright falsehoods. Changes may have been slow in coming but they came. The land was reclaimed from forest by the switch from the ox to horse for plowing; iron plows facilitated the expansion of fields, the diet improved, horse drawn carts moved masses of goods, masted ships increased trade. From the hated Arabs, Western Europe learned how to build windmills and water mills. The energy was used to mill and grind and manufacture. Also from the Moors, the Europeans learned algebra and systems of bureaucracy.

The slow economic development, so outpaced by the Arabs and the Byzantines, led to the growth of towns. Some Medieval cities had never ceased being urban trade centers, London and Florence for example. Towns challenged the feudal warlords and the church for local political control. Trade between Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East grew and continued almost unabated despite genocidal crusades. Gradually, urbanization fosters the construction of cathedrals, public buildings, gardens, universities and trade guilds. Processions, tournaments, festivals, and feasts grew more elaborate as the cities and ports became richer.

But along with technological and economic development, there were many challenges, conflicts and disasters throughout the Middle Ages. Barbara Tuchman's widely renowned: *A Distant Mirror* is sub-titled "The Calamitous 14th Century". The Roman Catholic Church struggled to gain authority in the interpretation of scripture in conflict with competing dogmas it deemed heretical. Thus it battled Palagianism, Albigensianism, Arianism, and the Lollardism

of Wycliff. Since the sun, planets, and stars were visible perpetually in the night sky, the pagan gods associated with them prevailed throughout the Middle Ages. St. Anselm felt compelled to limit the worship of the sun by his parishioners. Astrology and numerology competed with Christianity and was often absorbed in an uneasy alliance by Christians, Jews and Moslems. Roman and Germanic paganism's survival is evident in the received names of our weekdays: Moon's day, Tieu's day, Woden's day, Thors' day, Freia's day, Saturn's day and Sun's day. Similar absorptions appear in German, Flemish, and the Romance languages.

Some of the ancient arts made positive contributions to the development of science, for example, alchemy, astrology and herbology. On the other hand, the church fought against threats from ancient culture both real and imagined, contending with sorcery, magic, witchcraft, demonology and alleged ritual murder. We will examine the charges of witchcraft and heresy in the Trial of the Templars, and the Trial of Joan of Arc.

We have already mentioned the frequent failure of the knight to worship his par amour from afar. We review the noble knights from the rosy lens of Arthurian romances and Hollywood depictions, Sean Connery and Richard Gere most recently. But the need for a Truce of God and the testimony of more honest medieval chroniclers suggests a grittier reality. We will examine the more nefarious motives of knight's to seek loot, ransom and foreign fiefdoms as part of their crusading zeal. We will look at the frequent sieges and the treatment of the besieged non-combatants. Pledged to protect the peasant and the modes of agricultural production, we will observe how the peasant fared during medieval marches and warfare. Also, we will examine the effect of the Companies and condottieri; knights unemployed in the crusade who served either themselves as brigands or hired themselves out as mercenaries.

Finally, the writer Christine de Pisan will testify against the code of chivalry, claiming that knights failed miserably to protect women from slander, violence and degradation.

One of the greatest challenges of the Middle Ages was Bubonic plague. Following the trade routes from the East, the plague struck the European continent in several vicious waves, eventually wiping out about a quarter of the population. Reactions to the terror of sudden death were mixed. Some blamed the population for insufficient faith and moral depravity. The plague was divine retribution for sin and would be lifted if mankind atoned. The Flagellants marched from village to town, displaying self-inflicted wounds. Convenient scapegoat's were the Jews who held out against the Messiah they had executed. Rumors that Jews kidnapped Christian children and drank their blood in order to maintain their human appearance were abundant. Flagellants attacked and slaughtered Jews on their pilgrimages.

Others lost faith and hope during the plague and celebrated and engaged in lives of sensual immediacy. Boccaccio, who sets his Decameron in the time of plague, which he had experienced, exemplifies this freer more sensuous attitude, making the author a bridge between medieval thought and Renaissance early modern thought. Petrarch lost his childhood love Laura to the plague, but like Dante and Beatrice, chose to sublimate his sensual love for a spiritual love of the soul of Laura on the way to perfect Beatific Love Itself.

The plague's releasing population pressures and renewing demand for the reduced supply of labor led to economic advances of all classes in Europe including the peasants.

The peasants, however, hardly accepted their appointed rung of the social ladder, as we will see on our examination of the Peasant Revolts of the 14th Century.

The Papacy faced its biggest challenge in its conflict between the popes and European monarchs. This sword/scepter dispute pitted the Vatican against the Kings and Emperors designs on church landholdings, tithes and other revenues. We examine the dispute through Dante's De Monarchia and the rivalry between the Guelphs (papists) and Ghibelines (pro-emperer) factions. The battle for earthly supremacy led to the French Monarch Philip IV's invasion of Rome and installation of the popes in Avignon. This so-called "Babylonian captivity" lasted from 1309 to 1378. However, even after Catherine of Siena convinced the pope to return to Rome, the Church experienced a period of armed turmoil where two rival popes, one in Avignon and one in Rome vied for supremacy. Even after the end of this "Papal Schism", the conflict between popes and emperors continued unabated, leading ultimately to the sack of Rome by

Charles V's German mercenaries, whereupon then de Medici Pope Clement VII sought refuge in the Castel Sant Angelo (1527).

Finally, we explore the challenge of medieval thought introduced by secular humanism and empirical science. We have seen that the classic texts of Greece and Rome were studied and incorporated into the thought of medieval Jewish, Moslem and Christian thinkers. However, education and scholarship were hampered by the ignorance of Greek. Many of the greatest Greek texts, including the bulk of Plato's writings remained untranslated in the West, although the Byzantine had complete familiarity with them. As trade, banking, craft workshops and commerce began to flourish in urban centers in the High Gothic period, an educated class of secular scholars, useful as secretaries, letter writers, ambassadors, and negotiators, began to appear in European courts. These scholars became interested in all things pagan, from the art, architecture, sculpture of ancient Greece and Rome to the Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Latin literary corpus. These secular humanists sought to retrieve for Western Europe the former glories of ancient Greek and Roman Empires, contrasted with the rather turgid style of clerical scholastics, their elegant, erudite latin style wowed the courtiers and literate guildsmen of Europe. Some seemed to worship paganism, while others preferred a use of Latin and classic allusions to advance the Christian faith. All rejected the Aristotelian scholasticism that had become the official medium of the Church. Many penned blistering critiques of the social mores of their day and of the corruption, debauchery and hypocrisy of the church hierarchy. Such critical analysis took the form of calls for reform. This culminated in the Protestant reformation of the 16th century.

Another step towards modernism was the challenge to the Aristotelian world-view by early proponents of scientific or empiricist's worldviews. We will see that Francis Bacon's methods of learning produced such anti-commonsensical conclusions about the physical universe that he exceeded the tolerance level of church authorities and was burned as a heretic. The seeds of experimentalism are carried forth by Giordano Bruno, in the 15th century by Leonardo DaVinci, and in the 16th by Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo. The discovery by Galileo of the correct path of comets hailed the smashing of the crystalline aethereal orbs of the Aristotelian geo-centric universe and the end of the medieval worldview.

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