

History of Christian Movements and Theology



6. Corruption, Conflict and Christ-Likeness in the High Middle Ages

Key Dates

793	The <i>Viking Age</i> . Sack of Lindisfarne. Viking attacks on Britain begin.
885	Arrival of the disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Bulgaria. Creation of the Cyrillic script; in the following decades the country became the cultural and spiritual centre of the Eastern Orthodox part of the Slavic World.
910	Cluny Abbey is founded by William I, Count of Auvergne. Cluniac Reforms go on to influence the whole of Western Monasticism.
1014	“Filioque” added to the Nicene Creed; offends the Eastern (Byzantine) Church
1033	Birth of Anselm, Father of scholasticism; argued for the incarnation & redemption
1054	The “Great Schism”, the final break between Rome and Constantinople
1079	Peter Abelard born; refined scholasticism; taught that the death of Christ was just a moral example for us to imitate
1079	Seljuk Turks increase restrictions on Christians accessing the Holy Land
1093	Bernard of Clairvaux born; helped reform the monasteries; Augustinian theology reference points for Calvin and other leaders of the Reformation
1095	Pope Urban issues the Crusades to capture the Holy Land, and to repel the Seljuk Turks from the Byzantine Empire Alexios I Komnenos. The first of 9 Major Crusades, and a number of other crusades that would spread into the late 13th century.
1096-1099	The First Crusade; called by the Pope to save Constantinople, heal West/East relations and secure access to the Holy Land
1098	The Cistercian Order is founded.
1100	Birth of Peter Lombard; a theological writer who influenced Calvin

Overview

Approaching the end of the first millennium, communities in the west of Europe were poor, fearful and backward, compared with the Byzantine Empire and expanding Muslim world. Many believed that the year 1000 would mark the coming of the Antichrist, the beginning of the Millennial reign of Christ, or the end of the world; parts of Europe were experiencing famine and disease, invasions from all sides seemed inevitable; from 960 there was a growing conviction that all would change at the end of the century (although this did not happen as expected). Monasteries were multiplying; in parts of Europe they were the driving force of the church, the religious “centres of gravity”, of learning; places ordinary people felt comfortable with because they were homes to monks who would pray for their spiritual welfare. New religious orders were emerging. Pilgrims, mystics and hermits were increasingly common. The political, ideological and, in some cases, military power of the church (and the Papacy) was growing. Pressures from without came from Anglia, Saxony, the Hungarian Magyars and the Vikings.

During this period Europe was increasingly Christianised. Cultural patterns reflected Roman Catholic ideas in Frankish moulds. Following the defeat of the Muslim invaders at Poitiers by Charles Martel, power was concentrated in his hands and those of his son Pippin and grandson Charlemagne, who defeated the Lombards threatening Rome and was crowned Holy Roman Empire in Rome on Christmas Day in 800.

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What was Christian life/church life like for people in the Middle Ages?

After the rise of Charlemagne (Carolus Magnus, Charles the Great), the power of the Franks was consolidated. Charlemagne was involved in 53 military campaigns as he expanded the kingdom in every direction (Spain, Northern Europe, Eastern Europe and into the north of Italy and influencing/"protecting" the Papal states. Those in his family and service became increasingly wealthy, were close to bishops and others in the organised church (service in the church was an option for many families, led to ecclesiastical hierarchies which the earthly rulers often dominated), fostered local politics, intermarried, developed military alliances. Charlemagne instituted legal reforms, brought much of his kingdom under uniform laws. He was close to the Pope (on whom he relied to legitimise his rule); applied canon law; forced monasteries to adopt the Benedictine rule, encouraged a common cultural life across his domain. Most people could not read, but they learned from the churches, stained glass windows, the preaching of monks.

Charlemagne was an admirer of Augustine, adopted many of his ideas, believed in developing the City of God on earth. He admired the Christian Roman Empire (starting with Constantine), encouraged his scholars to study the early Fathers of the Church and apply their teaching and traditions. In one sense, this period marked the beginning of "Christendom" that was uniform, culturally Western. Stone churches became increasingly large and sophisticated. The reign of Charles' family did not last, but he introduced a new order. The Bible was central, and many of its models were seen as relevant to the European life. Growing gaps between rich and poor led to the emergence of religious orders dedicated to helping the poor. However, the Christianisation of Europe was often at the point of a sword; legislation made baptism mandatory, on the pain of execution. The poor were forced to serve in the army, even if this meant abandoning lands and families. Revolts were put down, until every tribe was subjugated.

The Church had its own lands, laws and taxes. Property was usurped. Tithes (plus) were compulsory. The Church also accepted different types of gifts from nobility and anyone who was looking for divine favour. As the role of the Church grew, bishops archbishops, and the pope bore great influence on the reigning kings in Europe. Those who spoke negatively of the church or opposed it were excommunicated so that they were not eligible for communion or to attend services. The whole empire was thereby turned into a hierarchical feudal system.

The era of Charlemagne and the rulers who followed him was marked by technological innovation, population explosion, growth in towns; people lived longer, mining increased and iron was increasingly used, leading to better agricultural tools and weapons (and increasing militarisation). The economies of towns became strong, road networks grew, trade between towns increased, powerful families and merchants became prosperous and formed alliances. Strong church communities emerged.

Mary and chivalry

Knights have their origins in Charlemagne's (9th century) Frankish cavalry. During the tumultuous years prior to the year 1000 AD, Western Europe suffered constant invasions (or threats of invasion) from barbarians and Muslims. This atmosphere provided the perfect environment for the emergence of a class of protectors—the knights. Military technology improved; better weapons and armour meant more effective protectors and increasing influence of the growing warrior class. As and the social and political climate settled, the romantic culture of knighthood could flourish. The worship of Mary translated into new forms of chivalry.

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Cluny

In 910 AD William the Pious established a monastery at Cluny; partly in response to (and then facilitated) a genuine European Christian revival. Despite its monastic setting, many adherents were genuine believers determined to purify the Church. This stood in stark contrast to the Papacy which had by this time become powerful but inherently corrupt.

Controversies

Filioque

How the Holy Spirit comes to Christians, and the way the Nicene Creed was changed offended Orthodox Christians. The distinction was a major factor in the Great Schism of 1054.

The Sacraments

Belief in original sin, combined with a high rate of infant mortality led the church to adopt infant baptism (as soon as possible after birth) instead of baptism for older Christians.

By 1000 the church had accepted the concept of transubstantiation at communion, ie the bread and wine become and body and blood of Jesus, sacrificed afresh. Theologians such as Ratramnun wrote in 950 that the bread and wine are “symbols”; however his works were condemned in 1050. At this time the church accepted the teaching of Lombard who proposed seven “sacraments” (or “rites”, regarded as outward and visible signs of divine grace): baptism; confirmation; Eucharist, penance; extreme unction; ordination; and matrimony.

Moral Decline of the Papacy

The mediaeval Papacy was characterised by moral decline. A genuine Christian had little or no chance of becoming Pope. Popes were imprisoned, overthrown and some were murdered (by 1012 six popes had been murdered during the previous 140 years; Leo V was murdered by his successor). From 1044-1046 there were three claimants to the position. It was not uncommon for cardinals and popes to have families, affairs and illegitimate children. The office was politically controlled. This led the church hierarchy to wrest control over choosing the Pontiff from political leaders and made the College of Cardinals responsible for doing so - the practice continues today. Controversy continued when popes such as Gregory VI declared that they had the God-given right to install or remove political leaders, including emperors and kings. Simony (purchasing positions in the church, named for Simon of Samaria, Acts 8:19-23) was widespread. The role of Urban II in launching the Crusades consolidated the political power of the Pope over the secular rulers. Opponents, such as Arnold of Brescia (1100-1155), who advocated the church returning to the simplicity of New Testament teaching and living, were exiled or executed.

The Crusades

A series of wars against Muslims, to regain/control Jerusalem and re-assert the dominance of Christianity in Palestine. The crusades were marked by corruption, political turmoil, rivalry, massacres. There was little if any spiritual value. While they gave competing rulers in Europe a sense of unity they were a disaster. They embittered Muslims against Christianity for centuries (the sentiment continues today). The crusades were “Christian” in name but not substance.

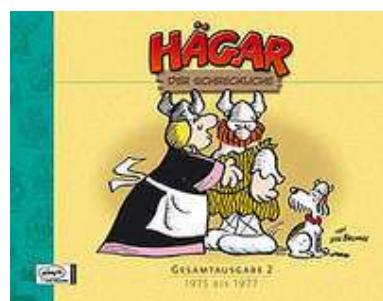
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The Era of the Vikings



The Era of the Vikings (Norsemen, or Normans) lasted for more than 300 years, from the late 8th century to the late 11th century. They came from Scandinavia and were feared as fierce and ruthless pirates. The Vikings were great explorers and voyagers. In 793, the Christian community on the island of Lindisfarne (on an island off the north-east coast of England, seat of a prior, then monastery, since the 7th century and a base for Christian evangelising in the North of England) was sacked by Viking invaders. The map above shows how extensively they travelled, raided and settled. Eventually they adopted Christianity and many settled in the Normandy area of northern France. In 1066 they invaded England (William the Conqueror).

A contemporary view:



Some Influential Christians During the Ninth to Eleventh Centuries

Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1053-1109)

Anselm is the most important theologian in the West between Augustine and Aquinas. His two great accomplishments were his Proslogion (in which he undertook to show that Reason requires that men should believe in God), and his Cur Deus Homo? (in which he undertook to show that Divine Love responding to human rebelliousness required that God should become a man). Like the early Christian apologists, Anselm demonstrated that we can approach theology with an appeal to reason, bearing in mind, however, that Christian belief > faith only ultimately occurs through revelation (1 Corinthians 2:14).

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For Anselm, “faith seeking understanding” means accepting the facts of revelation, then working them out in life. For Anselm, the Christian message centred on the fact that Christ as God and man was the only one who could provide satisfaction for sins through His death.

- ⇒ “Cast aside, now, your burdensome cares, and put away your toilsome business. Yield room for some little time to God; and rest for a little time in him. Enter the inner chamber of your mind; shut out all thoughts save that of God, and such as can aid you in seeking him; close your door and seek him.”
- ⇒ “Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me, when I seek you, for I cannot seek you, except you teach me, nor find you, except you reveal yourself. Let me seek you in longing, let me long for you in seeking; let me find you in love, and love you in finding. Amen.” (Proslogion, prologue)

While Anselm was a man of his time and tradition, his approach to Christ and the atonement is nevertheless evangelical.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142)

Abelard was a medieval French philosopher/theologian. He championed the use of “reason” in matters of faith, arguing that people should make every effort to understand their beliefs. He wrote and said many things that were open to criticism from the view of theological orthodoxy. Detractors claimed that he followed Arianism, Pelagianism, and Nestorianism. This led him into lengthy conflict with Bernard of Clairvaux over the use of reason in understanding/interpreting the Christian message. He was scholar-in-residence at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, until his romantic involvement with Héloïse d'Argenteuil, whom he secretly married (and with whom he had a son; this led to his castration, by his enemies, abetted by the uncle of Héloïse); he then entered the Benedictine monastery of Saint Denis; he moved a lot, as his reputation waxed and waned. At the height of his popularity he had thousands of followers. Arguably the most famous philosopher of his age; he polarised opinion in church and society. Detractors claim that Abelard misunderstood the Trinity and the nature of sin, did not support the doctrine of redemption through Christ’s death at Calvary; that Jesus announced God’s plan but did not achieve it > his life and death was simply a “role model” of love for each of us to follow. Towards the end of his life he was excommunicated by the Pope as a heretic, but this was downgraded and he spent his final months at the priory of St. Marcel, near Chalon-sur-Saone, before dying on 21 April 1142.

Peter Lombard (1095-1160)

A scholastic theologian of the twelfth century, Lombard taught doctrine in the cathedral school of Notre Dame, became bishop of Paris in 1159. The importance of Lombard was his approach to systematic theology. Earlier theologians, such as Isidore of Seville, had outlined doctrines from Bible texts and quotations from the early church Fathers. In the eleventh century this method had given place to new philosophical approaches and methods of interpretation.

Lombard is best known for his Four Books of Sentences, written between 1147-1151. The book is a compilation of extracts from the Bible, Church Fathers (especially Augustine) and other sources; it consists of the selection of passages, attempts to reconcile them where they appear to defend different viewpoints; the material is arranged in a systematic order. The collection starts with the Trinity in Book I, then moves on to creation in Book II, treats Jesus, the saviour of the fallen creation, in Book III, and deals with the Catholic sacraments in Book IV.

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After its composition this work became a standard work of theology throughout the Middle Ages in Europe (and beyond, eg Lombard is credited with having a strong influence on the theology of John Calvin).

Lombard is credited with some erroneous views about the Holy Spirit.

The Crusades

The Crusades were a series of wars waged by Christian Europe, in the name of Jesus Christ, against Muslims occupying the Holy Land.



Since the time of Constantine Christians had made pilgrimages to the Hold Land. Since the capture of Jerusalem by Caliph Omar in 637, Jerusalem had been governed by Muslims, but they tolerated Christian pilgrims because they helped the economy. In the 1070s, Seljuk Turks (who were also Muslims) conquered these holy lands and mistreated Christians. They also threatened the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Alexius asked the Pope for assistance, and Urban II, seeing a way to harness the energy of Christian knights, made a speech calling for them to take back Jerusalem. Thousands responded, resulting in the First Crusade.

Urban II made his speech calling for Crusade at the Council of Clermont in November, 1095. This is seen as the start of the Crusades. However, the “Reconquista” of Spain, an important precursor to crusading activity, had been going on for centuries, and there were fears of invasion from other areas (Sicily and Southern Italy had already come under Muslim control, from North Africa).

There were as many different reasons for crusading as there were crusaders, but the single most common reason was piety. To crusade was to go on pilgrimage, a holy journey of personal salvation, in the hope of pleasing God and earning eternal life. To many this meant giving up virtually everything and willingly facing death for God. For those willing to do so the church offered “absolution” for all kinds of sin, eternal bliss (especially for martyrs who died in defending the cause of Christ, miracles for participants and their family members back home, cancellation of their debts, pardons for convicted criminals and escape from their feudal lords.

For others it created opportunities to indulging blood lust without guilt, or seeking adventure, gold or personal glory.

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The Crusades contributed greatly to changes in Europe. The effort of raising armies and providing supplies for Crusaders stimulated the economy; trade benefited, as well, especially once the Crusader States were established. Interaction between the East and West affected European culture in areas of art and architecture, literature and education. Urban's vision of directing the energies of warring knights outward succeeded in reducing war within Europe. Having a common foe and objective, even for those who did not participate in the Crusade, fostered a view of Christendom as a united entity.

The leaders of the First Crusade included some of the most distinguished representatives of European knighthood. Count Raymond of Toulouse headed a band of volunteers from Provence in southern France. Godfrey of Bouillon, the Duke of Lorraine and his brother Baldwin commanded a force of French and Germans from the Rhineland. Normandy sent Robert, William the Conqueror's eldest son. The Normans from Italy and Sicily were led by Bohemond, a son of Robert Guiscard, and his nephew Tancred.

The months that followed the Council of Clermont were marked by an epidemic of religious excitement in Western Europe. Popular preachers everywhere took up the cry "God wills it!" and urged their hearers to start for Jerusalem. A monk named Peter the Hermit rode from town to town, carrying a huge cross before him and preaching to vast crowds. Hordes of poor people (including children) set out, unprepared, unorganized and mostly unarmed, on the road to the Holy Land. This was called the People's Crusade; it is also referred to as the Peasants Crusade. Dividing command of the mixed multitudes with a poor knight, called Walter the Penniless, and followed by a throng of about 80,000 persons, Peter the Hermit set out for Constantinople via an overland route through Germany and Hungary. Thousands fell in battle with inhabitants of the countries through which they marched; thousands more died from hunger, disease and exposure to the cold. The Peoples Crusade was badly organised; most were unarmed and lacked the command and discipline of the military crusaders.

The Byzantine Emperor Alexius I sent allies with them to Asia Minor, but most of them were slaughtered by the Turks. Walter the Penniless and most of his followers perished. Very few of those who had set out with Peter or Walter made it to Jerusalem.

Peter the Hermit survived and eventually led the Crusaders in a procession around the walls of Jerusalem just before the city fell.

Meanwhile real armies were gathering in the West. Recruits came in greater numbers from France than from any other country, a circumstance which resulted in the crusaders being generally called "Franks" by their Moslem foes ("ifranji", from "Frank, is still a common term for "European" in the Arab world). They had no single commander, but each contingent set out for Constantinople by its own route and at its own time.

The expedition numbered about 700,000 men, of whom 100,000 were knights (estimates may be inflated). The crusaders crossed Europe by different routes and reassembled at Constantinople. After crossing the Bosphorus, they captured Nicaea, the Turkish capital, in Bithynia and then set out across Asia Minor for Syria. Arriving at Antioch, the survivors captured the city, and then pushed on towards Jerusalem. The Siege of Antioch had lasted from October 1097 to June 1098, had nearly collapsed on several occasions, but was sustained by preaching, promised of eternal rewards and legends, eg Bartholomew, who claimed to have had a vision and then found the spear that pierced the side of Jesus.

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Reduced to around a quarter of their original number, the crusaders ("Warriors of the Cross") advanced on Jerusalem. When at length the Holy City burst upon their view in 1099, they embraced one another with tears of joy, embraced and kissed the ground on which they stood. As they passed on, they took off their shoes, and marched with uncovered head and bare feet, singing the words of the prophet: "Jerusalem, lift up thine eyes, and behold the liberator who comes to break thy chains." Before attacking the city the crusaders marched barefoot in religious procession around the walls, with Peter the Hermit at their head.

The first assault made by the Crusaders upon the walls of the city was repulsed; but the second was successful, and the city was in the hands of the crusaders by July 1099. Godfrey of Bouillon and Tancred were among the first to mount the ramparts. Once inside the city, the crusaders massacred their enemies without mercy. A terrible slaughter of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (including local Christians and Jews) took place.

Orthodoxy and the Great Schism

Western and Eastern Christianity continued their separate ways. Byzantine was stronger than Rome, but exposed to invasion from the east. Orthodox missionaries continued to push north into Eastern Europe and as far as Siberia. In 806 Basil reached the Khazars, Moravians and Bulgars. Cyril and Methodius, brothers, from Thessalonica reached the Slavonic people and settled in Bulgaria. Slavs found Greek difficult to understand so the brothers translated Christian liturgies into Slavonic and devised a new alphabet, Cyrillic.

Christianity in Russia

In the 9th century Russia adopted Christianity twice: firstly in the year of 957 in the time of Olga and then at the time of Vladimir (ruler of the Kingdom of Kiev, in modern Ukraine) in 988. After the christening of Olga, the Christianisation of Russia (starting with Kiev) began to develop rapidly. The population were obliged to follow their leaders. Russia entertained friendly relations with both the Byzantine Empire and the Roman Church. The building of churches began. Due to economic and cultural affinity with the Byzantine Empire and other orthodox states, the Russian Church adopted Orthodoxy (and was against the Roman Catholic faith).

The Great Schism

"One summer afternoon in the year 1054, as a service was about to begin in the Church of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) at Constantinople, Cardinal Hubert and two other legates of the Pope entered the building and made their way up to the sanctuary. They had not come to pray. They placed a Bull of Excommunication upon the altar and marched out once more. As he passed through the western door, the Cardinal shook the dust from his feet with the words: 'Let God look and judge.'" (*Ware, Timothy, The Orthodox Church, Penguin Books, Suffolk, 1993, p. 43*)

Between the fall of Rome and 1000, Muslim armies had taken over Egypt, Palestine and Syria. The Eastern and Western Churches of Europe had become estranged, along theological, linguistic, political, and geographic lines. In the early Church there had been unity in the faith, but a diversity of theological schools. Greeks and Latins had each approached the Christian message in different ways.

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The Latin approach was practical, the Greek speculative; Latin thought was influenced by juridical ideas and Roman law, the Greeks understood theology in the context of worship and liturgy. When thinking about the Trinity, Latins started with the unity of the Godhead, Greeks with its “threeness”; when reflecting on the Crucifixion, Latins thought of Christ the Victim, Greeks of Christ the Victor; Latins talked about redemption, Greeks about deification. With no political and little cultural unity, no common language - there was a danger that each side would follow its own approach in isolation and push it to extremes, forgetting value in the other point of view. In the early 1050s matters came to a head. The Western church had been forcing the Greeks in Byzantine Italy to conform to Latin usages; the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, in return demanded that the Latin churches at Constantinople adopt Greek practices (when they refused, he closed them, 1052). In 1054 Pope Leo excommunicated Cerularius. In turn, Cerularius excommunicated Leo. The church had officially split.

Issues Facing Christians During this period

- secularisation of Christianity - no one can serve incompatible masters (Christ OR the world and its ways)
- God gives us the ability to reason, plus believe; we can explain the hope that is within us (Anselm); faith and reason are often seen in contrast, but do not have to be so
- Christians can have a relationship with God through Christ (alone) without requiring the intervention of human agents (Anselm)
- when we serve God there may be reverses, things that we do not understand, but he will ultimately have His way among the nations (cf conversion of the Vikings)
- mission is never easy; it may involve going into completely new cultures, languages, facing dangers, suspicion, but when God opens hearts He makes a way and gives wisdom to His servants to know how to do His work (Cyril and Methodius)
- hundreds of thousands volunteered for the Crusades; thousands perished believing they were Christians, doing God's work; the Crusades were not a Christian response to Islam; “human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:20)
- the period saw growing emphasis on infant baptism (and “Limbo” for unbaptised babies); purgatory; celibacy for priests; transubstantiation; indulgences through works
- in every age, God has had some who have remained faithful to the true Gospel

Additional Reading

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Abelard's Errors, As Proposed by William of Saint-Thierry in Sens in 1140

1. Faith is the appraisal of the invisible.
2. It is wrong to differentiate between “Father” and “Holy Spirit. The fullness of the Supreme Good is portioned out.
3. To the Father belongs fullness of power, and to the Son as certain measure of power; the Holy Spirit has none.
4. The Holy Spirit is not consubstantial with the Father in the same way as the Son is consubstantial with the Father.
5. The Holy Spirit is the *anima mundi*
6. Free will is sufficient, without the help of grace, to ensure our ability, and our resolve, to do good.
7. It was not to deliver us from the power of the devil that Christ was made flesh and underwent His passion.
8. Christ, God-made-man, is not one of the three Persons in the Trinity.
9. In the Eucharist, the form of the original substance continues to exist in the consecrated vessel.
10. The devil uses physics to lead men into temptation.
11. We have not inherited original sin from Adam, but only punishment.
12. Without consent to sin and contempt of God, there is no sin.
13. Where concupiscence, delectation and ignorance exist, there is no sin but simply the handiwork of nature.