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Teaching Notes

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A.C.T.S. Church History Seminar

Medieval Christianity: Popes, Monks, Crusaders, and Scholastics (590-1517)

I. The Fall of Rome and the “Dark Ages”

A. Barbarian Invasions

- Alaric and the Goths: Sacked Rome, August 24, 410

“The world goes to ruin. Yes! But in spite of it, and to our shame, our sins still live and even prosper. The great city, the capital of the Roman Empire, has been devoured by a great fire, and all over the earth Romans wander in exile. Churches which were once revered are now but dust and ashes.” Jerome

“Meanwhile, Rome was destroyed as a result of an invasion of the Goths under the leadership of King Alaric, and of the violence of this great disaster. The worshipers of many false gods, whom we call by the customary name pagans, attempting to attribute its destruction to the Christian religion, began to blaspheme the true God more sharply and bitterly than usual. And so, “burning with zeal for the house of God,” I decided to write the books, *On the City of God*, in opposition to their blasphemies and errors.” Augustine, *Retractions*

- Vandals siege Hippo as Augustine lays dying
- Other barbarian tribes conquer other portions: Goths, Visigoths, Vandals, Burgundians, Lombards
- YET many of them “convert” to Christianity (if only Arian form)
- Eventually, even Arian barbarians won to Nicene orthodoxy

Boniface: courageously cut down sacred oak of Thor and preached gospel on stump; German tribe converted (Shelley, p. 152)

B. Monastic Organization: The Rule of Benedict

1. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-c. 543): educated in Rome, shocked by immoral lives of companions; left school in his teens & retired to dark, secluded cave at Subiaco to live as a hermit for three years
2. A.D. 529: founded monastery in picturesque Neapolitan Region at Monte Cassino
3. Began organized monasticism: composed “Benedictine Rule”

Benedictine Rule:

I) **Organization**: At the head of each monastery was an abbot

II) **Three-fold Vow**: perpetual obedience to the order, voluntary poverty/celebracy, obedience to a superior

III) **Exercise**: manual labor, educational instruction, worship, meditation, study

IV) **Simplicity**: simplicity must govern every area of life

4. Benedictine Order the model for all following monastic orders
5. Great influence through copying of Scriptures and other books

C. The Rise of the Papacy

1. “Pope” = “father”... came to mean bishop of Rome
2. Tradition has Peter as the first bishop of Rome
3. Barbarian invasions greatly increased pope’s authority in West
 - keeper of Western culture, ancient civilization, order, justice
4. Leo the Great (Pope 440-461)
 - first “pope” (in modern sense)
 - A.D. 452: courageously faced Attila & the Huns (the “scourge of God”)... road to Rome wide open; persuaded Attila to bypass Rome
 - led negotiations with Genseric and Vandals in 455
 - gained great prestige from these encounters

- claimed to be Peter's successor... laid the grounds for "Papal succession"

5. Gregory the Great (540-604) (Pope 590-604)

- (A.D. 590) Rome in agony: floods, war, then the plague [carts piled high, people went insane; Pope Pelagius II died, screaming in agony]
- Gregory a monk; fled and hid rather than be pope... found in a forest, dragged back to Rome
- Fifty, balding, frail, no craving for papal office... began immediately to build what became a Christian Europe out of the ashes of ruined Rome
- Prolific writer, organizer of monasteries, sender of missionaries for Nicene Christianity (Visigothic King Recared converted in Spain through missions he sent; also sent missionaries to England which brought British Isles under Roman Catholic sway)
- **Medieval Catholic errors:** established tradition on a par with Scripture; followed Augustine too literally, developed doctrines as fact which Augustine merely speculated upon (e.g. purgatory); BUT set aside Augustinian emphases on grace/predestination in favor of practical theology of how we can be made right w. God: penance = contrition, confession, satisfaction (i.e. punishment); theology of mass said for those in purgatory developed fully

Gregory on purgatory: A certain monk died in sin. His abbot (Gregory himself) ordered that daily masses be said on behalf of the deceased, whose soul appeared to a brother after thirty days, declaring that he was now free from purgatory, and had moved on to heaven. From then on 30 masses were said to be sufficient to free a pious person from purgatory

It wasn't until the Reformation that purgatory was challenged as unscriptural

- **Original sin & free will:** Sought a middle course between Augustine and Pelgius on grace & free will: our sin in Adam weakened but did not destroy our ability to choose what is good; once grace begins to work on us, we can cooperate and earn merit for ourselves by good works
- **Saints in heaven:** Developed a theology of the help (treasury) of the saints in which the excess good works of the saints can help people get out of purgatory; also their prayers were to be sought constantly
- **Relics:** Along with that, established practice of venerating relics as an aid to devotion: locks of hair, pieces of bone, finger nails, articles of clothing of holy martyrs were seen to have special spiritual powers

- **The Mass:** Greatly enhanced prestige and importance of the mass & the Holy Eucharist... constant partaking of Eucharist sustained and strengthened spiritual life
- **Papal authority:** Though scorning high-sounding titles, effectively ruled the Western Church; YET was extremely humble man who hated any vestige of his own pride
- **Land ownership:** Began the practice of acquiring land in Italy called “The Patrimony of Peter”... taxed inhabitants and ruled it like a king
- **Clerical celibacy:** established practice that all priests should be celibate
- **Episcopal succession:** all bishops must be ordained by existing bishops
- **Growth of monasticism:** Gregory was at his heart a monk, an ascetic who frequently fasted and spent long hours in prayer; under his leadership monasticism flourished; from him we got the origins of the “Gregorian Chants”

D. The Islamic Conquests

- Mohammed (c. 570-632): Arab merchant & camel driver, in contact with Judaism and various pseudo-Christian sects; had faulty understanding of both; saw a vision of angel Gabriel of a single God, just and merciful, who rules all things and requires obedience from everyone... began preaching in Mecca
- Arab merchants in Mecca (polytheists) persecuted Mohammed and he fled to Medina in A.D. 622; this is considered the beginning of Islamic era; founded Islamic rules, practices; established in Medina a theocratic state; repulsed attacks of Meccans; eventually conquered Mecca; by time of death (632) all of Arabia lay at his feet
- Arab warriors, fired by Islamic zeal, swept across North Africa; Carthage fell in 695; North Africans (who'd lived through strife between Catholics, Arians, Donatists, & Byzantines) accepted Islam; Arabs also conquered Persian empire and came to edge of Byzantine empire in modern Turkey... during this time they conquered the Holy Land sites, including Jerusalem in A.D. 638.
- A.D. 711: crossed Straights of Gibraltar, swept up through Spain and conquered weakened Visigothic nation there; soon almost all of Spain controlled by Moslems
- Swept across Pyrenees Mountains into France and were finally stopped by Charles Martel (Charlemagne's father) at the Battle of Tours (A.D. 732)

Significance: 1) many ancient centers of Christianity now Muslim: Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus, Alexandria, Carthage; in many of these areas Christianity ceased growing or disappeared altogether; 2) The Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman Empire) was pushed back to modern Turkey and its holdings in Europe; some theological centers which had disagreed with Byzantine doctrines

disappeared, and Eastern orthodoxy took off without their restraining influence; 3) Geography of Christianity totally changed; no longer centered around Mediterranean, now centered in Europe itself, a north-south axis including British Isles, the Frankish kingdom, and Italy; 4) Eastern Christianity became more and more isolated from Western Christianity

II. The Carolingian Empire

A. Charlemagne

1. Christmas Day, 800: Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, King of the Franks, as the first of the “Holy Roman Emperors”
2. Ruled over territory formerly controlled by Roman Empire... now under the sway of the Church
3. Almost all of Western Christianity under Charlemagne’s control
4. In 784, had conquered Frisians and Saxons, and had forcibly baptized thousands; many of these newly baptized Saxons then used similar “conversion” techniques with their neighbors
5. Charlemagne ruled “Christendom”... a Church-State mixture in which he held authority over both political and religious affairs; pope maintained influence over church matters
6. Charlemagne a patron of learning; education revived under his rule

B. Feudalism & The Holy Roman Empire

1. **Land:** Main source of wealth became land; Kings and lords paid for services by granting authority over lands; thus was feudalism born
2. **Feudalism:** hierarchical system based on holding of lands in which each feudal lord, while receiving homage from those who owed their lands to him also paid homage to the greater lord from whom he’d received his
3. **Fragmentation:** vassal landowners could always defect and claim allegiance to another master; constant alliances major and minor being formed; kings lost power as a result
4. **Church lands & posts:** abbeys and bishoprics had vast land-holdings too; bishops, abbots, abbesses became powerful political figures whose support all sought; therefore who had the authority to name successors to those posts became immensely important
5. **After Charlemagne:** series of “Holy Roman Emperors” chosen by intricate means with greater or lesser influence and authority depending on political circumstances

C. Rebirth of Learning: John Scotus Erigena

D. Papal Decay:

1. Crowning of Charlemagne: put papacy in ambiguous position
2. Popes crowned the emperors, BUT Rome itself frequently in disorder
3. John VIII: tried to stem Muslim invasion, failed miserably & assassinated
4. Pope succeeded pope in rapid sequence

“Cadaveric Council”: A.D. 897, Pope Stephen VI presiding; disinterred one of his predecessors (Formosus), dressed him in his papal robes, displayed him in the streets; tried him in papal court, found him guilty of a multitude of crimes, was mutilated, and what was left of his body thrown in the Tiber River

5. At one point (A.D. 1045) three men simulatenously claimed to be Pope, each with powerful backers; it took King Henry III of Germany to depose all three and gathered a council which named Clement II to be Pope... Clement II promptly crowned Henry III to be Holy Roman Emperor
6. Thus violence, corruption and intrigue characterized the last stages of the Carolingian Era

III. A “Christian Society” and the Crusades

A. Monastic Reform

1. Benedict’s Rule: gradually ignored
2. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) & the Cistercians: taught that the contemplative life was superior to the laboring life; pious mystic, staunch defender of orthodox faith; practiced rigid asceticism, disciplined his monk with firm but loving care; outside monastery preached to great crowds; focused on “Union with God” resulting in creativity; wrote hymns such as “Jesus Thou Joy of Loving Hearts, “O Sacred head Now Wounded,” and “Jesus the Very Thought of Thee”

“The story of Martha and Mary in the Gospel shows that the contemplative life is to be preferred. Mary chose the better part... But Martha’s part, if that is our lot, must be borne with patience.”
Bernard of Clairvaux

3. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226): founded Franciscan order; dressed scantily, took up with lepers and other social outcasts; in 1210, drafted a set of rules for life which became the basis of Franciscan life; given permission by Pope Innocent III the right to start a monastic order, granted also the tonsure (bald haircut on top of head) as symbol; ministered extensively to the poor; took strict vows of poverty themselves; considered himself

“Married to Lady Poverty”; Francis himself went to Morocco as a missionary to Muslims; wrote famous prayer of Francis:

Prayer of St. Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love

Where there is injury, pardon

Where there is doubting, faith

Where there is despairing, hope

Where there is darkness, light

Where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master, grant that I may seek not so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love another

For it is in giving that we now receive, it is in pardoning that we are now pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life

B. The Crusades

“I say it to those who are present. I command that it be said to those who are absent. Christ commands it. All who go there and lose their lives, be it on the road or on the sea, or in the fight against the pagans, will be granted immediate forgiveness for their sins. This I grant to all who will march, by virtue of the great gift which God has given me.” Pope Urban II (A.D. 1095)

1. The First Crusade: called by Pope Urban in 1095 to reclaim Holy Lands from Muslim “infidels”... thus would enable the pious to make pilgrimages to Holy Land again; said “Deus vult” (“God wills it”); by July 15, 1099 they Crusaders had gained Jerusalem and slaughtered the inhabitants mercilessly; Crusaders, feeling their task accomplished, returned home
2. Later Crusades: Jerusalem reconquered easily by Muslims; Europeans needed to be stirred again to action; mystics (like Bernard of Clairvaux) began to have visions of another Crusade; later crusades included the tragic “children’s crusade” resulting in horrible slaughter; final crusade ended in 1270
3. Results: nothing lasting of any benefit; lasting hatred in Muslim world

C. The Flowering of Scholasticism

Two key factors: 1) rise of Universities 2) reintroduction of the teachings of Aristotle in the West

1. Schools of Scholasticism

- a. realism: universals have a separate existence apart from individual objects
- b. conceptualism
- c. nominalism: universals have no existence except in the thought of an individual

2. Prominent Scholastics

a. Anselm (1033-1109)

“Father of the Schoolmen”; born in Northern Italy; entered a monastery in 1060 after a bitter quarrel w. his father; wrote *Cur Deus Homo* (“Why God Became Man”); argued that sin leaves man in infinite debt because of disobedience to God (importance of a crime measure in terms of the one against whom it was committed); only Christ’s death cancels that debt; opposed patristic idea of “ransom to the devil”; a realist, tried to prove ontologically the existence of God; the mere fact that we have an idea of God means that He must exist; said “I do not understand in order that I may believe, I believe in order that I may understand.”

b. Abelard (1079-1142)

Peter Abelard: French; known for love affair w. Heloise; wrote “Yes and No” in which he took up 158 theological questions and showed that various authorities and Including the Bible) did not agree; a moderate realist: universal ideas exist in the mind of God, are embodied on earth, and also are subjective ideas in the mind of man; believed Christ’s love **demonstrated** God’s love but was not substitutionary atonement; Bernard of Clairvaux opposed him, said he had mingled pure faith with human philosophy

c. Albertus Magnus (1200-1280)

German; encyclopedic knowledge earned him title “Universal Doctor”; expert in Aristotle, used Arabic commentaries to help him understand Aristotle; sought to adopt doctrine of Aristotle to purposes of church; was Thomas Aquinas’s teacher

d. Aquinas (1225-1274)

Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of the scholastic theologians; masterpiece was *Summa Theologiae*, used Aristotelian categories to prove such doctrines as the existence of God and then faith in biblical revelation to establish such doctrines as the incarnation and the atonement; his theology was established as the normative Roman Catholic theology by Council of Trent after the Reformation; believed that prior reason was always the lead to subsequent faith

IV. The Late Middle Ages: Preparation for Reformation

A. Waning Papal Influence, GREAT PLAGUE OF 1347

B. The “Babylonian Captivity” of the Church: papacy in Avignon France under French domination

C. Nominalism

D. The Rise of Nationalism

E. Reform Movements

1. Mystics

2. Early Reformers

a. John Wycliffe (1329-1384) English Reformer, “Morningstar of the Reformation”

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b. John Huss (c. 1373-1415) Bohemian Refomer (modern Czech Republic); influenced greatly by Wycliffe, began following Wycliffe’s teachings and sought to translate the Scriptures into the common language of the people; also attacked transubstantiation, subservience to the pope, popular belief in the saints, efficacy of priestly absolution, etc. In short, Hus was Luther 100 years too early; burned at the stake

3. Reforming Councils

4. Reforming Humanists: (Erasmus)