

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“THY KINGDOM COME: THE WITNESS OF CHURCH HISTORY”

“The Rise of the Papacy”

I. The Pope’s Rise to Power

A. Feudalism

Charlamagne’s reign (800-825 AD) as a “new” Holy Roman Emperor paved the way for a time of peace, prosperity, and spiritual growth in the heart of Europe. This period is known as **the Carolingian Renaissance**. During this renaissance (literally means “rebirth”), he commissioned **Alcuin of York to spread classical learning through the monasteries**. However, following Charlamagne’s death, his empire disintegrated due to weak leadership that could not hold the vast territories due to competition and rivalry between nobles. As a result, when the Viking invasions began, many people surrendered their lands to these nobles (counts, dukes, lords) for protection. Thus, land became the new form of economic control. This led to feudalism.

Feudalism was a type of government where private individuals exercised government control rather than the state. The lord owned the land upon which the vassal would serve him in return for living on the land (fief). The vassal would have to promise 40 days of military service on behalf of his lord. The ceremony binding a vassal to his lord was considered sacred. During the ceremony, known as **the act of homage**, the vassal knelt before his lord, swearing on the Bible or a cross that he would be loyal. By the end of the 11th century (1099 AD) the ceremony included the vassal joining his hands and extending them to his Lord. The lord would clasp his hands around the vassal’s hands, pull him up and kiss him. **This joining and extending of hands eventually became a symbol and posture of prayer and is why we have “praying hands” today.**

The problem with feudalism was that it gave certain people power simply based on who controlled the most land and people. The Church found itself in need of protection from the Vikings in the North and the Magyars in the East from Asia. **So, bishops and abbots became vassals of the feudal barons of France and the kings in Germany.** In the tenth and early 11th century it meant that the pope didn’t have the power to challenge those secular rulers if a bishop felt threatened.

However, there were some positives that came from the influence of the Church (where the Kingdom of God came!). **A code of conduct developed called chivalry that helped limit feudal warfare. As a result, bishops began what were called the “Peace of God” and “Truce of God” movements.** The “Peace of God” banned sacraments for all those who pillaged sacred places and killed noncombatants. The “Truce of God” established “closed seasons” on fighting such as Lent and other holy days.

After the **German king Otto the Great revived the Holy Roman Empire in 962**, some of the order and unity that was had during Charlamagne’s reign was restored. And once again, the Church turned to a political ruler for protection. This led to more German control of the Church for the next century.

During this time, attempts at reform of the Church so that it would be more independent of state control began within the **reformed Benedictine order of Cluny**. While it first focused on the monasteries and their corruption, it then turned to the priesthood, enforcing clerical celibacy and the **abolition of simony** which was the term (from **Acts 8:9-25** where Simon the magician sought to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit from the apostles) **given to the practice of buying or selling a church office**. The goal was to separate the Church from civil/lay control and bring it back under the authority of the pope. As a result of this reform movement three hundred Cluniac monasteries were freed from secular control and **the College of Cardinals was formed in 1059 which would then be responsible for the election of future popes**.

Archdeacon Hildebrand, elected pope in 1073 as Gregory VII (1073-85), led the way for these reforms and reinforced them during his papacy. **He believed the spiritual power of Rome should be over the temporal (political) power of kings**. He threatened excommunication of any ruler who performed **lay investiture – where the secular ruler would appoint a church official**.

The most visible example of this conflict showed itself in Gregory's discipline of emperor Henry IV who had appointed his own choice to be the archbishop of Milan in Italy. Henry appealed to the German bishops who supported him in a synod convened in 1076. However, Gregory responded by excommunicating Henry and telling his nobles they were no longer obligated to follow him! So the German nobles took advantage of the situation and revolted against Henry. This caused Henry IV to come to the pope barefoot and in sackcloth to repent of his actions. The pope "reinstated" Henry. However, Henry reneged on his repentance and took an army and attacked Rome. Pope Gregory fled but the damage had been done. The Church had a new power it could wield on rich and poor alike – excommunication and the threat of damnation!

By the end of Gregory's reign as pope, the papacy held sway over the political rulers of much of Western and Northern Europe. By 1122, a compromise known as the **Concordat of Worms maintained the church's right to elect its own officers, albeit in the presence of the emperor and his representatives**. **This set the stage for the papacy to hold authority over the spiritual well-being and conduct of its subjects, which included all subjects of the Holy Roman Empire**. Recall there was no separation of Church and State so to be a subject of the king meant that you were also subject of the pope.

The popes now had momentum to use their power to influence the rulers and laity of Europe. **This included the threat of excommunication for individuals, and the interdict which was excommunication for entire nations**. In other words, the sacraments would be denied not only to individuals but to all the citizens of a particular land if the ruler defied the pope. As a result, the pope became a feudal lord, himself.

The epitome of papal arrogance came during the papacy of Pope Innocent III. **Upon becoming pope in 1198, Pope Innocent III declared, "The successor of Peter is the "Vicar of Christ": he has been established as a mediator between God and man, below God but beyond man; less than God but more than man; who shall judge all and be judged by no one."** He went on to say to the rulers of Europe that the papacy was like the sun, while the kings were like the moon. As the moon derived its light from the sun, so kings derive their power from the pope!

The pope's power was put to the test when King John of England disagreed with him over the election of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In response Pope Innocent III excommunicated King John

and placed England under interdict! The barons of England revolted against King John and he gave in, becoming a vassal of the Pope and paying him a sizable annual tribute!

B. The Crusades (1095-1291 AD)

As a result of the Muslim conquests of North Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Europe, one half of Christendom found itself under Islamic control. It had been a tradition of the Christian faith for pilgrims from across the Roman world to visit the sacred sites of the Holy Land. For the most part, Muslims allowed this. However, during the 11th century pilgrims began to face persecution which intensified when the Seljuk Turks rose to power and seized Jerusalem from fellow Muslims and took Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) from the Byzantine Empire (recall the Eastern half of the former Roman Empire ruled from Constantinople). Even the Byzantine emperor was captured. **His plea for help as well as the reports of evils inflicted upon believers by the Turks led Pope Urban II to call for what was essentially a “military pilgrimage” to regain the Holy Land.**

NOTE: *The term “Crusade” was used retroactively in later centuries to describes these “military pilgrimages.”*

The First Crusade (1095-1099) began a series of religious wars between Christians and Muslims that would last nearly 200 years. There would be a total of seven main crusades. The first as the most successful of the seven as it did result in the retaking of the Holy Land including Jerusalem from the Muslim Turks. However, thousands of Jews were massacred in the Rhineland (parts of German and France) by local mobs as well as Crusaders enroute to the Holy Land. Tens of thousands of Muslims in the Holy and were killed as well a result of the conflict. It led to the creation of the feudal Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, remnants of which survived until 1291. The next six crusades were failures. The most famous was the Third Crusade of 1189 as it involved Kings Frederick Barbarossa of Germany, Richard the Lion-Hearted of England, and Philip Augustus of France on the one side, and renowned Muslim leader Saladin on the other. Saladin was able to convince King Richard to agree to terms of peace

The Fourth Crusade was the most damaging to the relationship between Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians. This fourth crusade came about shortly after Pope Innocent III became pope in 1198. **It led to the violent takeover and plundering of Constantinople.** The Crusaders never even reached the Holy Land but simply set up the Latin Empire of Constantinople in 1204. While Pope Innocent III condemned the brutal actions of his invaders, he still appointed an archbishop of Constantinople to serve Roman interests.

While there would still be several more Crusades including a Children’s Crusade, these all failed so by 1291, the last Christian stronghold of Acre fell to the Muslims. Jerusalem and the Holy Land would remain in Islamic hands until 1917, when the British and Australians under General Allenby took the area out of Turkish control during a series of battles, the most famous being the Battle of Beersheba.

It should be noted that during the Crusades semi-monastic Military Orders were established, the most famous being the Templars (Knights of the Temple). Two other orders included the Hospitallers (Knights of St. John of Jerusalem) founded to care for the sick and wounded, and the German order known as the Teutonic Knights. The purpose of these orders was to protect pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land and to fight back the Muslim hordes.

The Crusades were an abysmal failure. They highlighted the arrogant and absolute political power of the papacy which was able to appeal to its “God-given” authority to compel its subjects to take up arms. How opposite the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, **“He who lives by the sword will die by the sword.”** Jesus came to seek and serve the lost and those were His orders to us!

The results of these God forsaken actions have been resented by Muslims and Jews to this very day. The Rhineland massacre of Jews was the first in a series of antisemitic persecutions in Germany that would culminate in the Holocaust. While the persecution of Jews was often condemned by Popes and other church and political leaders, their admonitions were often ignored by local populations.

With the last Crusade in the 13th century, the papacy’s standing would continue to erode over the ensuing centuries losing its once dominant role in the political affairs of men, and even weakening its spiritual influence as well. How ironic that it would be *after* Pope Innocent III declared popes to be the “*Vicar of Christ*” (God’s mediator between God and the earth), that the true decline of the papacy began.

C. Education (the good), Indoctrination (the bad), and the Inquisition (the ugly)

1. Scholasticism – Gothic cathedrals became popular during the middle part of the Middle Ages (10th-13th centuries). Builders tried to reach the highest heights structurally possible – some edifices rising as high as 30 or 40 stories. The tall spires and inspiring arches and steeples were meant to show man’s desire to reach out to the heavens – to God - reaching out for understanding - on the one hand, while the ornate and the colorful stained glass, statues and ornate woodwork which told the story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation were to highlight God reaching down to man in revelation. **Cathedrals became centers not only of Christian worship but also Christian education. Schools in the cathedrals gave birth to medieval universities.** The goal of Christian education was to understand God’s revealed and universal truths and how they apply to the human experience through reason. Universal truths would be those things one can learn from nature and creation while “hidden truth” is that truth that only is revealed by God. Human reason is our attempt to understand all truth. **While the early Church Fathers articulated the faith in theological and practical terms it was during this time period that a distinctive method of scholarship and unique theology emerged. We call this scholasticism – where “schoolmen” sought to reconcile** the truths of life with the spiritual truths of the Holy Scriptures. In other words, to bring together Christian doctrine and human reason and to arrange the teachings of the church into an orderly system. Note that this was not a “free search for truth.” The chief doctrines of the Christian faith were considered “fixed.”

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) played a major role in the development of scholasticism. His treatise title “Yes and No” posed 158 teachings from Christian teaching and answered them with conflicting quotations from the Bible, the Church fathers, and pagan classics. He wrote, “*The first key to wisdom is assiduous and frequent questioning...For by doubting we come to inquiry and by inquiry we arrive at truth.*” However, when he began to question the Trinity, he was condemned by a church council and confined to a monastery in 1121. He was permitted to leave a year later, gained a significant following of students and again was condemned for his questioning ways and in 1140 he returned to the abbey of Cluny, where he stayed in seclusion the last two years of his life.

Cathedral schools provided a curriculum of seven liberal arts subjects – grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. “Liberal” came from the Latin *liberi* which meant freemen as such study had originally been reserved for Roman citizens and not slaves. It was from these schools that arose universities. Masters would teach on a subject and gather students around them. Soon both masters and students began forming guilds called “universitas” which was the term used for any corporate group. Masters and students gathered in squares, sheds, in cathedral cloisters, and in rented rooms. Lectures and what was called the disputation served as the methods of teaching. The disputation included the debating of a text by two or more masters and occasionally the students employing Abelard’s question and answer approach. A logical conclusion came from a process that included questioning, examining, and arranging of details. What this enabled was for students to learn to think for themselves. Of course, all of this was under the watchful eye of the papacy.

2. Papal Authority and Thomas Aquinas

The popes wanted to make sure that any new development in the Church would be used for their maintenance of power – really a papal monarchy. During this time period, the two ways they increased their authority was through the development of canon law and a systematic theology of Church teaching. Canon law was to the church, what civil law was to the state. It sought to define the rights, duties, and powers of the lay and ordained. It was the law administered in all the ecclesiastical courts. What developed was called the *Harmony of Discordant Canons* that became the standard manual for all canon law – about 1140 – by the monk Gratian of St. Felix Monastery in Bologna, Italy. Canon law sought to control every aspect of one’s life, setting the parameters for penance for every sin, and requirements for every sacrament – baptism, communion, marriage, etc. With the emphasis on “God’s law,” it actually gave the papacy a rational legal basis (i.e., authority!) for what it did even more than the medieval state.

Universities and the increased learning that resulted, provided the papacy with a way to counter the heresies and questioning of authority that has also arisen as a result of increased learning. The Church needed to defend its authority with sound rational doctrine.

The one man who did the most to bolster the Church and its authority, and to also give a sound basis for understanding the Christian faith was Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). Thomas was a Dominican monk who had a brilliant mind, humble spirit, and tireless work ethic. His greatest work was his *Summa Theologica* (summation of theological knowledge). He was able to make a clear distinction between philosophy and theology, reason, and revelation, showing there is no contradiction between them. Both come from God. We can understand certain things - like God as Creator – from the natural world, while other things like the Trinity we can only understand by faith.

Thomas affirmed that man is saved through the death of Christ which demonstrates God’s grace and mercy. **However, the Church imparts God’s grace through divinely appointed sacraments – baptism, communion, penance, confirmation, extreme unction, marriage, and ordination.** Concerning holy communion, Thomas upholds the belief in what became known as **transubstantiation** – where the bread and the wine of communion become the same flesh and blood of Jesus on the cross. There is a supernatural change even though the outward nature of the bread and wine do not change. **Holy penance consisted of three elements** – 1) sorrow for sin, 2) confession to a priest who can pronounce absolution, and 3) satisfaction which would occur through

an act of penance that would include some sort of good deed. He also accepted **the practice of indulgences** in its basic understanding. There is a treasury of merit due to the work of Christ and the meritorious deeds of the saints. Priests may draw from this to help believers who may have followed Christ inadequately but must endure purgatory. **Thus, prayers to the saints for one's soul as well as extra devotion in the here and now can reduce time in purgatory. This gave the Church an incredible "right" to rule men's souls both here and now and after death!**

3. The Inquisition

This evil practice began in 1184 when Pope Lucius III required bishops to "inquire" into the belief of their subjects and hold an inquiry to find out if there was heresy. If so, the offender would be excommunicated. Due to the spread of the heresies of the Waldenses and Albigenses (see next section), **in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council under Innocent III provided that there be punishment for the unrepentant, confiscation of their property, excommunication for those who don't go against the heretics, and forgiveness for those who cooperate.** It affirmed that there is no salvation outside of the Church and *"every heresy that rises against the holy, orthodox and Catholic faith we excommunicate and anathematize. All heretics we condemn under whatever names they may be known."* In 1220, the Pope took the Inquisition from the hands of the bishops and gave that responsibility to the newly formed Dominicans. In 1229, at the Synod of Toulouse, the inquisitorial proceedings were made official resulting in an accused heretic having virtually no rights. One's trial was secret with no benefit of legal counsel or knowledge of his/her accusers. The pope not the law could only absolve a person. **In 1252, Pope Innocent IV authorized torture as a means of getting information and confessions.** This was contrary to centuries of Church teaching but by this time the papacy had grown too powerful! Since canon law forbade a cleric from shedding blood, the Church simply turned the offender over to the state to usually **be burned at the stake.** Better for the body to be burned at the stake than for the soul to burn forever in hell or so the Church proclaimed as a sick justification for their brutal methods.

D. Remember the Poor and the Apostolic Way!

The papacy's obsession with power and control led to corruption down the ranks of the clerical hierarchy. As a result, there came calls for change in the Church. These first came from certain monks who called for a return to the poverty of the early church. These changes affected mainly the monasteries, some of which also had become corrupt as well. However, the call for reform began to echo across the lands of the Roman Catholic Church.

1. Calls of reform and action

a. Robert Grosseteste – English bishop of Lincoln from 1235-53, condemned the greed and immorality of the priesthood and put the blame on the popes. This is significant as this criticism came from a bishop.

b. Arnold – an abbot at Brescia in northern Italy, called for the Church to shun riches and secular power and return to the simplicity and poverty of the early church. In 1139 his teachings led many in his city to rebel against their bishop. As a result, Pope Leo II banished him from Italy. Arnold fled to Paris and studied under Abelard. After five years, he came to Rome to join

a movement to overthrow the papal dominion. During the pope's call for a Second Crusade, the movement succeeded with Arnold stepping into the leadership of what was to be a purely secular government. This lasted ten years before Pope Hadrian IV was able to secure the help of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa who captured Arnold and had him executed in 1155 by burning. His ashes were thrown into the Tiber River.

c. Peter Waldo (1140-1218) – a rich merchant of Lyons, France. After converting to Christ and motivated by Jesus' words to the rich young ruler in Mt. 19:21, after making sure his wife and daughters were taken care of, he sold the rest of his estate and gave the proceeds to the poor. He then enlisted two priests to translate portions of the New Testament into French. After memorizing long passages of the Bible he went preaching the good news and calling all people – not just monastics - to a life of voluntary service and poverty. As he gained followers, he sent them out two by two. They called themselves the *Poor in Spirit*, but they later became known as *the Waldensians*. Of course, because they were not ordained or officially sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church, they met severe opposition. At first Pope Alexander III was impressed by their poverty and found no grounds for heresy. But he said they could only preach at the invitation of a bishop. Waldo found this to be unacceptable with God's Word. He and his followers continued to preach and grow in numbers across France and into Italy. But by 1184, their disobedience could no longer be tolerated as Pope Lucius III excommunicated them from the Catholic Church. **The significance of the Waldensians is that they understood that the authority of Holy Scripture is greater than that of any pope or bishop. No teaching except Christ's was binding. Salvation of souls was not the exclusive prerogative of the Roman Catholic Church which had come to proclaim that salvation could not occur outside its jurisdiction!** Thus, in many respects the Waldensians were forerunners of the Protestant Reformation to come three hundred years later.

d. The Cathari/Albigenses – the Cathari or “pure ones” was a movement that arose out of Bulgaria but gained traction around the town of Albi, France. Consequently, they also came to be known as the Albigenses. They were not believers and as such had never been members of the Catholic Church. They held that the universe was the source of the conflict between two powers, one good, the other evil. Matter, including the human body is the work of this evil power, the god of the Old Testament (sound familiar – recall Marcion of the 2nd century and Gnosticism). To escape the power of the flesh, the true Cathar was supposed to avoid marriage, sexual intercourse, the eating of meat, and material possessions. By denying the physical, one could join the ranks of the spirit. The good God sent Christ, who was never a human but only a spirit, to redeem mankind not by death on a cross but through His life teaching. He simply shows us the way. So unlike Arnold and Waldo, who were falsely branded as heretics, the Cathari really were heretical. How would the Catholic Church respond? **Three ways – 1) calling them to repent and turn to the truth 2) a crusade to crush their resistance and 3) the Inquisition**

e. The Dominicans – the first approach of calling the Cathari to repentance was tried but not very effective. A Spaniard named Dominic Guzman (1170-1221) who was helping in the preaching effort, recognized part of the problem. Many of the clergy sent by the pope used the power and prestige of their office to try and bring the Cathari around to faithfulness. **Dominic instead believed that a more effective way would be for the clergy to be committed to poverty themselves.** So, he went forth to the heretics as a poor man, barefoot and begging. After two years, Pope Innocent III decided to get tough and Dominic had to step aside. However, Dominic was still

convinced that preaching and poverty go together. He gathered a group of men to minister to heretics in other regions and by 1220, his mission gained official approval. The new preaching order became known as the Dominicans. These mendicant or “begging” monks were different (friars) than traditional monks in that they lived among the people, preaching and teaching the faith.

2. St. Francis of Assisi – despite the dark tide abusive power that seemed to be penetrating the Church, there were lights of goodness and hope. Francis of Assisi’s original name was **Giovanni Bernardone (1182-1226)**. He was the son of a wealthy Italian cloth merchant who had dreams that his son would become a knight. One military campaign seems to have changed the young lad’s mind. Captured in battle and languishing in a prison, he had a series of visions of Christ and was moved to go into full time ministry. **Taking the name Francis he formed a brotherhood of monks with a simple Rule based on Christ’s call to discipleship of taking up one’s cross and denying self, of selling all that one had and giving to the poor (the rich young ruler), and of fulfilling the Great Commission in Mt. 28:18-20.** He went to Pope Innocent III for approval and he was granted permission to go and minister in the name of Christ and of the Church. Francis called his group ***the Friars Minor*** but they became known later as **the Franciscans**. They did great work throughout Europe even though Francis’ initial endeavor to evangelize Syria and Morocco failed. **Later his group became an official arm of the papacy as the Franciscans became a monastic order who like the Dominicans were to spread the teachings and authority of the Church.**