

## Module Two

### EUROPE YESTERDAY: RECOVERING THE PAST

**1000-1500 Monks and Scholars** *How a movement born in Egypt's desert brought learning to the European peoples, and agitated for reform.*

#### A. A Christian society emerges: power, wealth and corruption

##### 1. Europe at the turn of the millennium

We have seen the emergence of 'Europe' through the common adoption of Christianity by the peoples migrating into the western peninsula of Eurasia.

Firstly the Greek and Roman peoples embraced Christianity, and the peoples absorbed into the Roman Empire, including Egyptians.

Then the monastic movement starting in Egypt spread east and west, impacting Gaul, Ireland, Scotland and England, and the Celtic and Roman forms merging into the Anglo-Celtic missions of Willibrord and Boniface to reach across to the Friesians and Germans. An eastern expression, led by Cyril and Methodius, spread up from Greece among the Slavs to today's Czech Republic.

Rivalry between west (Latin) and east (Greek) had flared at times into political and ecclesiastical antagonism: attacks on icons, different calendars, celibacy, tonsures.

Under Charlemagne, the Carolingian (Frankish) Empire peaked and then split up. The ongoing invasions of Magyars (Hungarians) and Vikings brought further trouble, before they too were finally Christianised around the end of the first millennium.

The church's uneasy relationship with power, begun with Constantine, continues throughout the centuries. Emperors and kings clashed with popes as to who had final authority.

So while it was clear that as the second millennium began, Christianity had succeeded in becoming the accepted faith and worldview, it was also obvious that God's Kingdom of 'shalom' had not been ushered in. *Christendom* meant *Europe* meant *Christendom*, but it was a far from perfect expression of Christ's Kingdom on earth.

##### 2. Monasteries continue to shape society

The monasteries, we have seen, had become the building blocks of the new social order that emerged out of the decline of the Roman Empire. They were the new social units that demonstrated a community lifestyle centred on the gospel commands to love God and neighbour. A covenantal social lifestyle, based on promises before God rather than power or kin, provided new ways for men and women to live together. These centres facilitated education, agriculture, art, publishing, commerce and trade, and created a hegemony of order and harmony attracting artisans and craftsmen to settle nearby.

Celtic and Benedictine monastic communities formed networks across western Europe, encouraging exchange and travel between regions. While bishops and priests oversaw local networks of dioceses and parishes, monastic orders were not responsible to those clergy, but to their mother houses, which in turn were answerable directly to the pope.

While the monastic houses had been the main centres of learning, with the rise in the power of bishops and kings, education became centred around bishops' schools – minster schools attached to cathedrals. Monastic orders grew isolated from the social order.

*New orders:* At the turn of the millennium, the *Cluny Order* was beginning to spread out of eastern France, north of Lyon, from its huge impressive mother base built in Romanesque style, most of which still stands today (very close to Taizé). This order reinvigorated monasticism across borders from Spain to Germany, and from Italy to England. By 1100 the Cluny Order had 1450 houses with 10,000 monks and an influence that lasted 250 years.

*Cistercians* - 1097 Citeaux; Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) the most influential Christian of his time; the Christian life was an experience of progress in love. Emphasised manual labour (*to work is to pray*), simplicity of lifestyle. Hundreds of new monastic houses established. By late C12th, had become wealthy, lax and ineffective.

(Cistercian hymn: *O Sacred Head, now wounded*)

By 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, towns and cities were developing and the security of the monastery was less necessary. Cloistered monasteries began to decline, and new expressions of faith were needed to enable men and women to work among the population while yet living by a spiritual *regula* or rule.

The *Augustinians* were one such order, or Austin monks, who used the Rule of Augustine - later Augustinians included Thomas a Kempis, Erasmus and Luther).

New groups of preaching monks, or friars, emerged in the 13<sup>th</sup> century – preaching, teaching, evangelizing, doing social work in towns and cities.

### **3. Pilgrimages, relics & church traditions:**

The pilgrimage emerged as a popular expression of devotion with the rise of the cult of relics. Old pagan ideas resurfaced in the cult of saints and martyrs when god and goddess worship was transferred to biblical figures and saints. The worship of Diana (Greek) or Isis (Egyptian) was transferred to Mary; chapels and churches were built over tombs of martyrs; relics of saints were sought after for as sources of healing, protection and other blessings, with the encouragement of early theologians such as Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome. One early protest came from Vigilantius, a priest in Aquitaine: *'We almost see the rites of the pagans introduced into the churches under the pretext of religion'*.

Relics became sought after by clergy as spiritual attractions in cathedrals and other places of worship. These became foci for pilgrimages which were often made to fulfil a vow of penitence, to seek spiritual blessing, or simply for adventure and lighthearted fun (See Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*). The discovery of St James' bones in Santiago de Compostela gave rise to the development of the *Jacobsweg* trails from England, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and France to northern Spain, enjoying a revived popularity today.

Other pilgrim routes led to Rome and Jerusalem, or more local goals such as major cathedrals in Reims, Notre Dame, Chartres, Utrecht, Canterbury, Lausanne, St Gallen...

Such trans-European networks helped spread culture, forms of liturgy (cf. spread of Taizé songs today), and educational ideas, and deepened the sense of a common 'European' (=Christian) identity.

#### **4. Universities:**

Schools run by cathedrals and the scriptoria of monastic orders gave birth to universities beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in, for example, Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge. The term *universitas* meant a guild or corporation of teachers and scholars.

Much of the university culture was drawn from ecclesiastical practice, with gowns, community life under a rule, titles, architecture, monastic type chapels with facing choir stalls, etc. Professors and students were considered to be clerics, although behaviour often fell short of that ideal.

While adopting the late Roman system of knowledge developed by Alcuin in Aachen (the *trivium* of grammar, logic and rhetoric, and the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music), theology became known as the 'queen of the disciplines'. Greek philosophy was introduced via the Muslims and Jews of Spain and south Italy through the recovered writings of Plato and Aristotle. Aquinas attempted to reconcile Aristotle's ideas that matter and form were eternal and history was an endless cycle of existence. His harmonization of faith and reason accepted Aristotle in matters of reason, and Scripture in matters of faith. Revelation supplemented but never contradicted reason, he taught. Aquinas' dualism was to dominate Catholic thinking for many centuries.

Franciscan Roger Bacon (1214-92) in Oxford resisted Aquinas' method and laid groundwork for modern science by emphasising observation and measurement for understanding the world.

#### **5. Cathedrals:**

Cathedrals became symbols of the Christian society of the Middle Ages. The whole society participated in the building of these grand structures. *Cathedra* = bishop's chair. In 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, great spate of cathedral building - in France alone, 80 cathedrals built in 200 years. Romanesque style (Norman in England) peaked in mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, Gothic (= 'barbarian') mid 13<sup>th</sup> century. Place of religious ceremony and pilgrimage, plus civic activity, social services (crypt often shelter for poor or pilgrims), arts, music and even trade. Focus of political rivalry - .e.g. ever increasing height of towers: Chartres to 123m; Strasbourg 142m, Cologne 156m!

#### **6. Cities:**

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a process of urbanization began, creating a new urban culture different from the rural model in which the monastery dominated. Now the diocesan church began to take the leading role. Hence the emergence of urban orders as mentioned above.

Many cloisters could be founded within the same city: see Utrecht (28 cloisters at the time of the Reformation), Amsterdam, Zwolle,... Cty states, *communes*, emerged first in northern Italy and then in northern Europe. Contracts and agreements were made and renewed annually among *citizens, burgers*. Voluntary associations for all sorts of purposes were formed: economic, educational, charitable, religious...

Erasmus at the time of the Reformation said, *what is a city other than one big monastery?*

See Govert Buijs article: *Revolution of love*

### **7. The Great Schism 1053**

The Eastern and Western Churches had been drifting apart for some centuries. From the five patriarchal centres (Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople) three had been conquered by Islam; that left Rome and Constantinople in rivalry for leadership. Although both Roman and Byzantine leadership had participated in the councils which produced the early creeds, various doctrinal and liturgical differences began to emerge, as well as differences in calendar and tonsure.

Great tension developed around the addition to the Nicene Creed by the Roman Church of the *filioque* clause: a dispute as to whether the Spirit was sent by the Father *through* the Son, or *and* the Son (!)

Offence was taken by Rome's assumption that she could change the creed without consultation and agreement with Constantinople.

None of the tensions had led to rupture, until the time of the Crusades when contact between east and west was intensified. The Patriarch of Constantinople was not prepared to accept Rome's assumption of leadership of the whole Christian world. He supported a council of the five patriarchs.

One day in 1054, the papal legate strode into the Hagia Sofia during a mass and slapped a papal bull on the altar excommunicating the Eastern Church.

This split created a spiritual faultline that has affected the social, political, cultural, economic and spiritual landscape for over nine centuries!

### **8. The Crusades**

In 1095, Pope Urban II called for aid for the Eastern Church against the Muslim Turks who had captured Jerusalem, thus disrupting pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and threatening Constantinople itself. The enthusiastic response led to the recapture of Jerusalem in 1099. Holy war and pilgrimage had become intermingled. Several new orders were formed to protect pilgrims: Johanniten (St Johns), Teutonic Knights (Duitse Order), Knights of the Temple (Templars)... The crusades really were a continuous movement from the 11<sup>th</sup> century through to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Church began launching crusades against 'heretical' groups such as the Albigenses in France, or the Taborite Hussites in Bohemia (15<sup>th</sup> century) or pagans such as the Lithuanians (13<sup>th</sup> century).

### **9. The Inquisition**

- To non-Catholics it is a scandal; to Catholics, an embarrassment; to both, a confusion.

It is a handy stick for Catholic-bashing, simply because most Catholics seem at a loss for a sensible reply.

- Three different inquisitions

I. *The Medieval Inquisition*, in 1184 in southern France, was a response to the Catharist heresy. Phased out as Catharism disappeared.

II. *The Roman Inquisition*, begun in 1542. The least active and most benign.

III. *The infamous Spanish Inquisition*, started in 1478, a state institution used to identify *conversos* – Jews and Moors (Muslims) who pretended to convert to Christianity

for purposes of political or social advantage and secretly practiced their former religion.

More importantly, its job was also to clear the good names of many people who were falsely

accused of being heretics. It was the Spanish Inquisition that, at least in the popular imagination,

had the worst record of fulfilling these duties.

The various inquisitions stretched through the better part of a millennia, and can collectively be called "the Inquisition."

source: [www.catholic.com/library](http://www.catholic.com/library)

## **B. Agitating for reform: from Francis to Thomas a Kempis**

### **1. Francis of Assisi 1182-1226**

- a) a playboy converted
- b) Matt 10:7-10 - guideline for a lifestyle
- c) *Fratres Minores* (Lesser Brothers) - a preaching order (1209)  
*Poor Clares* (1212) - a women's order  
*Tertiaries* (1228) - a lay order
- d) contrasted with establishment priests
- e) against the stream - an audience with the Sultan
- f) { church reform & training  
{ evangelism of unreached/cross-cultural missions  
{ mercy ministries - poor, sick and needy

### **2. Dominicans**

A teaching order, grew out of the need for educated clergy – from Dominic de Guzman in Provence.(1170-1220). Order of Preachers- white habit and black overcoat – *Black Friars*. 'Watchdogs of the Lord' – *Dominicanus /domini canis* - hounding out heresy and ignorance. Academic emphasis contrasted with early Franciscan simplicity. Produced Thomas Aquinas, leading medieval theologian. Weak response to request from Kublai Khan for 100 missionaries for China - another missed opportunity?

### **3. Peter Waldo & the Waldenses**

- a) another dramatic conversion
- b) Matt 19:21 - "sell what you have, give to the poor"
- c) "poor men of Lyons"
- d) recognised by pope 1179, retracted 1181, excommunicated 1184
- e) set up own churches with bishops, priests and deacons
- f) persecuted, fled to alpine valleys - Vallenses;  
made contact with descendents of refugee believers from Rome
- g) spread throughout Europe, ideas scattered as seed for reform  
influencing Wycliffe, Hus and others.

### **4. John Wycliffe 1330-1384**

- a) Morningstar of the Reformation in England

- b) Oxford doctor, came to conviction that Scripture took precedent over Pope.
  - c) 1379 began translating Bible into common English.
  - d) Sent "poor preachers" to read Bible in market places
  - e) "acknowledged father of English prose" - Prof Burrows
  - f) died natural death - body dug up 31 years later!
  - g) greatly influenced John Hus in Bohemia through students
5. **John Hus (1369-1415) & Unitas Fratrum**
- a) influenced by both Waldenses and Wycliff
  - b) part of national church established by Cyril & Methodius
  - c) centuries of strife with Roman church
  - d) agitated for reform
  - e) Council of Constance 1415 - betrayed, burnt at stake
  - f) Hussites establish Unitas Fratrum, 1457 - persecution
  - g) set up first protestant church 1467
6. **Brothers of the Common Life - Geert Groote (1340-1384), a Kempis**
- **Devotio Moderna, the Modern Devotion.** Followers of Geert Groote (Dutch: Broeders des gemeenen levens). Lay, communities, publishing, education, in due course approved by the Pope. Groote died in 1384, succeeded by Florens Radewyns, who two years later refounded the monastery of Augustinian canons at Windesheim, near Zwolle, which was thenceforth the centre of the new association. Spread across to Poland. Erasmus and Pope Adrianus VI students.
  - **Thomas a Kempis** schooled in Deventer; entered Augustinian monastery at SintAgnietenberg, near Zwolle. Compiled 'Imitation of Christ'.

**Book list: 1000-1500 - Monks and scholars**

Dawson, Christopher, *The making of Europe*, Sheed & Ward, 1932  
*Religion and the rise of western culture*, Doubleday, 1957

Tourn, Giorgio, *The Waldensians*

A Kempis, Thomas, *The Imitation of Christ*

Dowley, Tim (ed), *Lion History of Christianity*

Follett, Ken, *The Pillars of the Earth*

Goudriaan, Koen (ed), *Vernieuwde Innigheid* (about *Moderne Devotie*, Geert Grote and Deventer)

Wright, Fred *The Cross became a Sword*

Article: Buijs, Govert, *Revolution of Love*, HOPE magazine

DVDs: John Wycliffe

John Hus

God's Radical (William Tyndale)

The Agony and the Ecstasy (Michaelangelo)

Saints and scholars (on Cambridge)