

The End of the Medieval Church Age

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – an overview of the end of the W medieval church and the events leading to modernity
2. aim – to cause us to grasp how the church of the middle ages sinks into a state ready for reformation

b. outline

1. The Political Events
2. The Natural Events
3. The Religious Events

c. overview

1. an **explanation** of the title of this lesson
 - a. the “medieval” period comes to an end as we approach the 16th C.
 1. the 13th C. is the “high” point of medieval civilization (**i.e.** the papacy at the zenith of power, the Mendicant orders setting out to bring the world to Christ, and the universities developing impressive theological thinking and systems of Christian thought)
 - b. however, the Catholic Church *at the center of this period of human history* will continue *unabated* until the present day (in the modern Roman Catholic Church)
 - c. so, I am using the term “end” to describe only the *period* (age), not the *church* in the W
 - d. but, the church *as she was* during the Golden Age (**see previous lessons**) wanes *dramatically* during the period from c. 1300 to 1500 – tonight, we will discuss some of the reasons **why**
 - e. the events of this period, *along with the general “drift” of the church away from orthodoxy*, makes it “ripe” for reformation, both *politically* and (most importantly, **IMO**) *theologically*
 1. **i.e.** the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Reformation will all “flow” from this period
 2. **e.g.** the rise of scholasticism (**see before**) – the introduction of *rationality* into doctrine and theology (vs. “blind” faith) will set the stage for a transformation of thinking *across the spectrum*

I. The Political Events

Content

a. the rise of nationalism

1. up until now, Europe has been largely led by the Pope and an emperor
 - a. feudalism (however) has slowly been replaced by a *monetary* economy – “wealth” moves from land holdings to money; the exchange of money replaces the “barter” system
 - b. which creates new “classes” of socio-economic status – money is more “fluid” than land
 - c. **e.g.** the rise of wealthy (and centralized) bankers and merchants lent power to kings able to raise armies and withstand the power of nobles (and a central emperor) of previous generations
2. nationalism = the movement away from the *feudal* system to more centralized governments under a unified border and authority
 - a. brought about by the bourgeoisie (**i.e.** the middle classes) supporting the efforts of kings to curtail the power of nobility – **i.e.** the power of money allows “ordinary” people to demand *representation*
 - b. the nations of England, France and the Scandinavian countries are developed first; Spain is formed near the end of the Middle Ages; Germany and Italy later
3. nationalism *undermined* papal claims to universal authority
 - a. **i.e.** popes *leaning* towards one nation’s interests caused other nations to establish “rival” popes that would look to local interests (**see below**)
 - b. **IOW:** the “singularity” of interest between a continental monarch and the pope of Rome is “shattered” by the localized interests of people, *including their spiritual needs*

b. the Hundred Years' War (1337-1475)

1. a constant series of conflicts between England and France that encompassed the rest of Europe (in one way or another)
 - a. Edward III of England claimed the throne of France, held by Philip VI (his cousin)
 - b. this, with the English invasion of Scotland (which France supported through King David) led to war
 - c. three phases: the Edwardian War (1337-60), the Caroline (1369-89), the Lancastrian (1415-53)
 - d. the result was a series of alliances (*i.e.* Bavaria, Navarre, Bohemia, Castile, etc.) dragging all of Europe into the conflict (*i.e.* the "First European War")
 - e. in the end, the House of Valois maintained the French throne and the two separate monarchies
2. Joan of Arc (1412-1431)
 - a. from the village of Domrémy, NE France
 - b. she claimed to have had visions from Sts. Catherine and Margaret and the Archangel Michael
 - c. the visions (she claimed) ordered her to lead the troops of Charles VI's son (the Dauphin) in battle against the English (who claimed the French throne)
 1. Charles VI showed signs of madness, and the result was *factions* within France that led to civil war between forces loyal to him and forces loyal to the English side of the equation
 - d. Joan had tremendous success in bringing the French civil war to an end, leading the troops of the Dauphin to break the siege of Orleans (becoming known as the Maid of Orleans)
 - e. after breaking the siege, she joined the Dauphin in triumphal march to Rheims, where he was crowned King of France (with her standing next to him at the altar)
 - f. unfortunately, continuing in battle against the English, she was eventually captured and sold to the bishop of Beauvais
 1. he tried her as a heretic (*i.e.* for having received instructions from heaven) and had her burned at the stake *at the age of 19*
 - g. she was sainted by Benedict XV in 1920; but has always been a national hero of France
3. (**again**) the Hundred Years war helps to shatter the international status of the papacy
 - a. at this time, the popes resided in Avignon (**see below**); so, the assumption by the English was that the pope was their enemy, giving his support only to the French
 - b. this weakened the power of the bishop of Rome, and allegiances to him were often forged by *nationalistic* desires

d. the fall of Constantinople (1453)

1. the short period of Latin rule (after the Fourth Crusade) had ended, but the E empire was weak
 - a. it consisted only of the city and some immediate surrounding land
2. the Byzantine emperors appealed to the W for help, but the popes were weakened by nationalism
 - a. the demand by the popes for "ecclesiastical reconciliation" was repudiated by various patriarchs
3. the siege of the city by the Turkish Sultan Muhammad II began April 7, 1453
 - a. on May 28, a solemn service was held in the Hagia Sophia, but the city fell the next day
 - b. Emperor Paleologus died, and the city was sacked for three days
 - c. the Hagia Sophia was converted to a mosque (although converted to a museum in the early 20th C., it has recently been reconverted to a mosque by the Turkish government)
 - d. the city was (eventually) renamed Istanbul
4. the E church would continue, but would no longer be under the protection of an empire

II. The Natural Events

Content

a. the Great Plague (1347)

1. the Bubonic plague (carried by fleas on rats) broke out in the Black Sea
 - a. it moved to Italy and N Europe, and swept the entire continent between 1348 and 1350
 1. fever → loss of balance → swollen lymph nodes + dementia – by the fifth day, death
 - b. estimates put the dead at up to 1/3 of the total population (*i.e.* 30-40%)
 1. **note:** COVID-19 has killed (?) only about .2% of the population of America (>Europe)
 - c. the plague abated after those first years, but new outbreaks occurred about every 10-12 years
 1. the later dead were mostly the young (*i.e.* the old had developed immunity)
2. the religious implications: death, judgment, and hell
 - a. since death was always close at hand, life became about "preparing" for it
 - b. this would give rise to superstition, pilgrimages, and (even) relic veneration for help
 - c. all of this would help to solidify the "mystical" state of the medieval church

II. The Religious Events

Content

a. the Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1309-1377)

1. a *twisting* series of events by which the popes became tools of French policy and took up residence in Avignon in the S of France – during the Hundred Years War (**see above**)
2. Gregory XI returned (the papacy) to Rome in 1377 at the urging of St. Catherine of Siena

b. the Great Western Schism (1378)

- a. the election of *two* rival popes by the same cardinals (Urban VI and Clement VII) due to the belief that Urban was *not* a valid pope
 1. Urban appeared to have gone mad with his demands over them, attempting to restore the college of cardinals to Italians only
 2. so, the same group of cardinals that had coronated Urban now elected Clement
- b. Clement moved to Avignon, while Urban remained in Rome; France and Scotland recognized Clement, England (and others) recognized Urban
 1. Rome (now) accepts as legitimate *only* those succeeding Urban (the others are *anti-popes*)
- c. this *dual papacy* and its *conciliation* would sow the seeds of Reformation (**see next**)

c. the question of this lesson

1. **question:** are the events of this period (**i.e.** the Hundred Years War, the Plague, the Babylonian Captivity) all a part of the sovereign plan of God to “move” the church in a different direction?
 - a. **IOW:** what has the church *become* (at this point), and what might God be doing to the world around it to sow the seeds of “new growth” out of the old “dead” stump?
 - b. **answer:** the church has become a *political* engine that has lost its power (spiritually), and even that *political* power has so dramatically waned (due to its own *internal failures*) that it is nothing but a “shell” of its former self
2. **IOW:** where is the gospel in all of this? what are people clinging to for their *eternal state*?