

FOUNDED UPON ROCK: PART VI
SCHISM AND RENEWAL: THE LATE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE

I. At one level, there was a great transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. But at another level, there was remarkable continuity as European society endured numerous crises, such as the Black Death, the Hundred Years war, Muslim conquests of Asia Minor and the Balkans, and schism within the Church, and yet persevered.

A. From the 18th through the mid-20th century, the most common view of historians was that the Middle Ages failed in the 14th and 15th centuries and that the Renaissance marked a dramatic break from it, beginning the modern era.

B. However, as C.S. Lewis noted in his 1954 inaugural address upon taking the chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge, there is more continuity than break from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. He argued that the major break occurred later, especially in the late 18th and 19th centuries, when society departed from any faith, education was increasingly specialized, technology dominated the economic, and the role of government was seen in shaping society anew. See “De Descriptione Temporum from They Asked Me for a Paper,” The Essential C.S. Lewis 471.

C. There was a shift in society from the High to the Late Middle Ages, and then again to the beginnings of the Renaissance in the late 15th century.

1. In the High Middle Ages, advancement in theology, prosperity, and the internal peace of Europe seemed to be the norm in Western Europe. The nations of eastern Europe also developed during this era, about 1221 – 1241, and some later occasions, created a crisis that would continue to haunt that region.

2. In the 14th through mid-15th centuries, a series of crises within the Church and from natural and foreign forces challenged society at its very core. The Church struggled through the Papacy being in Avignon and then the Great Schism; society struggled with war and plague. There were outside invasions from the Ottoman Empire. All of these crises challenged societies, but what is noteworthy is that they survived, albeit in different ways.

3. In the Renaissance era, a new optimism and prosperity did dawn that made life easier and culture more varied. But those very advantages would prepare the way for opulence, excessive power in the hands of the few, dissatisfaction and eventually division within Christianity.

II. The return of the Papacy back to Rome caused controversies that would lead to the greatest schism in the West up to that point.

A. Under Gregory IX, the papal court returned to Rome, but the next election there led to a disputed result,

1. Due to the protests against the Avignon Papacy, and with the strenuous urging of St. Catherine of Siena, a third order Dominican, Gregory XI moved back to Rome in 1376 and 1377. Most of the papal court and the cardinals opposed this move.

2. Soon after the move, Gregory XI died in 1378; and the Roman people were determined that the cardinals would elect an Italian Pope, who would be more likely to keep the papacy there in Rome.

3. And, so, under heavy pressure from the crowds, who were threatening to riot, the cardinals elected Bartholomew Prignano, the archbishop of Bari in southern Italy, as Pope. He took the name Urban VI and things seemed to be resolved. But he turned out to be very anti-French and routinely disparaged the French cardinals, who were in the majority.

4. In response, about half of the cardinals went to a small town outside of Rome and declared that the election of Urban VI was invalid due to coercion by the mobs. They then elected a French archbishop Cardinal Robert of Geneva, who took the name Clement VII and immediately went back to Avignon with his cardinals.

B. Now there were two plausible claimants to the papacy, and the Europeans were divided on which one was legitimate. Most of the Italian kingdoms, Germany, England (and its Irish possessions), Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Norway and Sweden were behind the Roman line. France, Scotland, the independent part of Ireland, the Spanish kingdom of Castille, southern Italy (the Kingdom of Naples) and Austria were behind the Avignon line.

C. This situation continued into the fifteenth century, as a claimant named Benedict XIII succeeded Clement VI, and Boniface the IX, Innocent V, and Gregory XII succeeded Gregory XII.

D. In 1410, a number of intellectuals in Europe, including some cardinals, called a council at Pisa, declared both lines illegitimate and elected as Pope a Roman cardinal and diplomat Baldassare Cossa, who took the name John XXIII. However, he soon engaged in nepotism, selling offices, and the like, which prevented him from getting much support.

E. A solution began when the German Emperor Sigismund called another council at Constance in 1414.

1. Sigismund both wanted peace in the Church and the legitimacy of being crowned Emperor by the universally recognized Pope.

2. Instead of trying to elect its own Pope, which would simply have created a fourth claimant, the Council began negotiations with the men who claimed to be Pope. Eventually, Gregory XII agreed that, if the council recognized him as the true Pope, he would resign. Then his cardinals and the council's representatives would get together to elect a new Pope.

3. The council agreed with this solution. And in 1417, the council elected Martin

V as Pope after calling for more councils to be held with some frequency in the future.

4. The other two claimants gradually lost support and the Church, and the antipope John XXIII eventually recognized Pope Martin V. The Church was thus once under one Pope. He agreed with the Council of Constance that there would be a general council every few years. And so Pope Martin V called a universal council in Basle in the 1431; and his successor Eugene IV likewise called another council at Ferrara five years later.

F. Another problem arose from this solution, the issue of conciliarism.

1. Many people began to argue that, councils were superior to Popes and could remove them. This view was opposed by the Popes, but supported by many of the bishops at the Council of Basle.

2. To prevent the Council from going in the wrong direction, Pope Eugene IV transferred the Council to Ferrara and then Florence in 1437. Some members of the Council stayed in Basle and tried to depose the Pope, but their efforts were mostly ignored.

III. Meanwhile, issues in the east both reflected threats to Christendom from without, but also led to efforts at unity within.

A. The Ottoman Turks (successors of the Seljuk Turks against whom the Crusades were fought) began advancing against the Byzantine Empire in the 14th century. In 1354, they began taking over most of the Balkans, the first Muslim possession in Eastern Europe. Armies of Serbia tried to drive them out, but the effort failed with the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, which the Ottomans won decisively. The Ottomans tried to take Constantinople itself in 1402, but they had to call off the attack because of invasions by the Mongol leader Tamerlane.

B. In the 1430s, the Ottoman Empire was once again advancing toward Constantinople. The Byzantine Emperor Michael Paleologus and the Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople, who was the leading prelate in the East, came to Italy to seek the assistance of the Pope and the western nations, offering reunion of East and West if the West would provide military help. Representatives from Syria, Egypt, and Ethiopia also came on behalf of the Orthodox churches

C. A strong central figure was needed in the Church for the discussions, and so the Pope's prestige increased quickly. A Council was meeting in Florence, and the occasion was a good forum for discussing the issues with the east. And so Pope Eugene IV took the lead in the negotiations.

D. In 1439, Pope Eugene IV and most of the eastern representatives agreed to the decree *Laetentur Caeli*. The eastern representatives agreed to reunite with the West under the rule of the Pope. And the Pope agreed to rally the west to the support of Constantinople.

E. Unfortunately, when the eastern patriarchs returned home, they could not persuade most of the eastern Christians to return to the Catholic Church. And, for their parts Popes Eugene IV and Nicolas V could not persuade many of the Western leaders to send help to Constantinople. The great Hungarian general John Hunyadi did lead a Hungarian, Polish and Serbian army, supported by Genoa and the Papal states and many French knights, to drive the Ottomans away from Constantinople. However, in 1444, they were defeated at Varna on the Black Sea by the Sultan Murat IV, who came out of retirement in response to this effort. The king of Poland was killed and the Hungarian Empire never really recovered.

- A Transylvanian noble named Vlad, often nicknamed the Impaler of Dracul (dragon) fought in these wars. His fierceness and violence later led to the stories about Count Dracula.

F. Then, in 1452, Murat's son Mehmet II turned his attention to Constantinople again. He raised an army from around the Empire to besiege the struggling city. The western powers did not intervene; and Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453. That victory for the Ottomans then cleared the way for further conquests in southeastern Europe. They even briefly help onto some land in Italy. The city of Belgrade did drive back a Muslim attack under the leadership of John Hunyadi and the spiritual support of St. John of Capistrano, the patron saint of military chaplains.

G. Despite the fall of Constantinople, the Council of Florence and succeeding efforts at unity in the Church did have some rewards. Many eastern Christians did return to the Catholic Church and formed most of what we now call the eastern rites of the Catholic Church. And the Western leaders began to develop a better defense against the Turks, that would repulse attacks into the rest of Europe.

IV. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth century, the cultural situation in Europe had been getting rather pessimistic as the optimism of the thirteenth century faded.

A. The plague called the Black Death came into Europe in 1347 and within three years wiped out a third of its population.

1. Trade had developed with nations far to the east. But with that trade came diseases as well. The worst of them came over on a ship to Sicily in 1347, probably due to fleas that tended to feed off of rats.

2. The disease was fatal most, but not all, of the time. It destroyed half or more of the population in the warmer environments and very large segments in the colder environments throughout Europe. The disease spread rapidly, and the lack of understanding about how it spread led to further panic and sometimes violence against outsiders.

3. The disease had the effect of increasing piety among some people, but also of creating cynicism and despair, as well as superstition, among others.

4. Gradually, the disease subsided, although versions kept coming back into the eighteenth century.

5. The Black Death shook up Europe, as laborers became scarce and land now relatively plentiful, compared to the population. The effect diminished the power and wealth of the landed aristocracy, and led to improved conditions for laborers, as well as merchants and anyone with innovations. As a result the feudal system went into further decline.

6. Within the Church, the Black Death led to the death of many clergy, as they died while ministering to victims. Their deaths led to an increased respect for clergy, but also led many dioceses to ordain new priests too quickly.

7. Remarkably, however, society still recovered as trade, culture and government resumed anew after the worst of the plague had passed.

B. The Hundred Years War raged between France and England from 1337 to 1453,

1. Due to the Norman Invasion of England in 1066, the Dukes of Normandy were also the kings of England. This situation led to a paradox, wherein the king of England was in theory also a vassal of the king of France. Practically, they often ran the Duchy of Normandy, which would eventually encompass most of western France, as part of their own kingdom.

2. Eventually, the kings of France tried to force more obedience from the Dukes of Normandy, who were also the kings of England. When, in the 1330s King Edward III of England began openly defying King Philip VI of France, Philip VI deposed him as Duke of Normandy and claimed his possessions in France. Edward III then claimed to be the rightful king of France because of he was the nephew of the previous king Charles VI, and thus more closely related than Philip VI.

3. The dispute continued for 116 until 1453 years with the advantage going back and forth. Toward the end of the war, St. Joan of Arc led the French forces to victory before being captured and burned at the stake. France would eventually win the war and reduced England's possessions on the Continent to the area around Calais in northwest France.

4. After the Hundred Years War, there was a succession crisis in England that led to the War of the Roses from 1455 to 1487 due in part to the ineffective rule of King Henry VI.

C. Within the Church, there was both a certain dissatisfaction, but also an increase in popular piety.

1. On the one hand, many prelates began acting more like noble lords and princes than spiritual leaders, often living high on the hog and concerning themselves more with political advancement than the salvation of souls.

2. This situation led to much popular discontentment. For example, in the Divine

Comedy, Dante places numerous recent prelates, including 4 of the last 7 Popes in hell. (It should be noted that one of those four, Celestine V was later canonized.) The Canterbury Tales, written at about 1400 contains numerous negative descriptions of secular and Church leaders alike, such as a worldly abbot, a vain prioress, a lecherous friar, and a pardoner who sells false indulgences and fake relics.

3. However, that there was also a solid basis of piety amidst all of the troubles.
 - a. Pilgrimages and devotions to saints were becoming more and more popular.
 - b. The first book off the newly invented printing press was the Bible. And, with the increased availability of books, spiritual writings, such as the works of St. Julian of Norwich, Piers Ploughman, and The Cloud of Unknowing become much more widely read.
 - c. The idea of Bible studies was increasing and research of the Bible, especially in its original languages, advanced significantly.
 - d. Even those who criticized the Church, such as Dante and Chaucer, were devout Catholics. The Divine Comedy is a profoundly Catholic work. And The Canterbury Tales, for all of the criticism of Church officials, is centered on a pilgrimage and describes a holy, learned, devoted parish priest and a very intelligent, devout clerical student.
4. St. Catherine of Siena (1347 -1380) also rose as a central figure, who would later be declared a Doctor of the Church.
 - a. St. Catherine of Siena was a devout young woman and the youngest daughter of a large wealthy family.
 - b. Opposing her family's desire for marriage in the noble class, she became a third order Dominican, i.e., one that would join in the spirituality of the Dominicans but live in the world.
 - c. She emphasized very much a constant desire of prayer, describing that connection with God as being as the inner circle of a wheel; all other desires are meant to be distributed proportionally around it.
 - d. She very strongly emphasized knowing oneself in the light of Jesus, focusing on His presence and asking what He thinks of one's life.
 - e. She also said that the progress of prayer is not in feeling, but in charity.
5. As the Middle Ages ended, there was a solid faith in Europe, but also a lot of restlessness in the ranks.

V. The Renaissance, which began in the mid-fifteenth century, marked a more optimistic time. That era saw a great increase in learning, artistic expression, technology and building, much of which benefitted the Church. But there was also an increase in worldliness, skepticism, and even decadence.

A. With reference to learning, the Renaissance promoted education for a broader range of the general public, and an emphasis on human expression, the classics and the sciences.

1. This general focus on broader learning actually began with the introduction of Greek philosophy to Europe in the twelfth/thirteenth century and was championed at universities of that era.

2. But starting in about the mid-fifteenth century, the nobles, merchants and families with financial means generally started having their children educated. The formal education was mostly for sons, but many families of the upper classes would hire tutors for the daughters as well. Thus developed the idea of a “Renaissance man,” i.e., one who had a vast array of talents and learning in many fields.

3. There was a greater focus on the classics of Greece and Rome, including even pagan literature. Before that era, at least in theory, people would study the pagan classics, such as the writings of Virgil or Ovid, only to learn style, not as good entertainment.

4. There was also a greater research into the original Greek and even Hebrew of the Bible. In addition, the greater literacy meant that more people could read the Bible. The Church never forbade the laity from reading the Bible, nor forbade translations of the Bible. The Church did insist that translations of the Bible, and theological texts generally, receive official Church approval.

B. Due to development of the moveable type printing press about 1436, there was a great increase in the availability of books and thus a vast increase in writing, both sacred and secular.

1. The first book off of the new printing press that Johannes Gutenberg developed was the Bible, indicating the importance of religious texts.

2. Also, due to the Crusades, the technology of making cheaper paper came to Europe in the thirteenth century. That technology was also essential to the vastly greater availability of books.

3. Italy was the center of printing in Europe; but by 1500, over 400 cities in Europe produced books.

4. These developments led to a great increase in the availability of books and the demand for literacy.

C. Artistically, the Renaissance promoted a much greater emphasis on realism, on the human form, and even on themes from pagan literature.

1. This artistic Renaissance, along with the architectural Renaissance, began in Italy in the fifteenth century, but spread to northern Italy by the early sixteenth century and then to the rest of western Europe.

2. With enriched capacities, such as the ability to produce three-dimensional focuses in painting and greater technology in the production and use of marble, realism became a focus. Artists would portray much more complex images, in painting, tapestry, and sculpture. Figures would be seen more often in motion and with greater expression.

3. The likes of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino) and Fra Angelico championed Renaissance art in southern Europe. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the likes of Peter Paul Rubens and Rembrandt (Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn) brought such the effects of the Renaissance to the north of Europe.

4. To the Church's advantage, there was a great deal of exquisite art portraying sacred themes. However, there was also a great emphasis on pagan themes in art. In addition, sometimes even the sacred art would become more the focus than the sacraments and prayer.

D. With reference to architecture, the Gothic style declined and baroque forms became more popular.

1. The term baroque was originally an insult, meaning eccentric, or odd. But it soon became accepted as a positive description.

2. Baroque architecture emphasized proportion and a focus on the realistic human form more. There were more rounded edges and lively decoration.

3. In Rome, the old St. Peter's Basilica had fallen into disrepair. And so, Pope Julius II began a complete reconstruction of the basilica, beginning in 1505. All over Rome and elsewhere in Europe, churches and other buildings were rebuilt in the baroque style. The Barberini family was particularly prominent in the Italian reconstruction.

E. Musically, there was a greater emphasis on lighter motifs and complex styles, such as polyphony and madrigals, which put popular poems to music and emphasized emotions.

1. There was a great flourishing of Mass parts set to music. However, sometimes the complexity became overbearing.

2. Entertainment and education in music became much more easily available.

F. Politically, there was a greater emphasis on centralization and the idea of a professional governmental and political class. Economically, trade led to a vast increase

in wealth, and also a greater power in the merchant class.

1. More powerful governments and monarchies developed in the great European kingdoms, such as England, France, Denmark and Sweden and the new kingdom of Spain (uniting the Christian kingdoms of Aragon and Castille.) The city states of northern Italy also increased in power. The power of the Holy Roman Emperor, however, was declining, as the princes of that Empire became more independent.

2. Macchiavelli's 1513 book The Prince would define, even now 500 years later, a more cynical view of government, not as reflecting an eternal order, but rather as a matter of gaining and keeping power.

3. There was also a greater willingness to critique powers in the world. In 1511, Desiderius Erasmus published In Praise of Folly, a satirical attack on many authorities and superstitions of the time. More positively, in 1516 he published The Education of the Christian Prince, which described the monarch as the servant of the people. His good friend Thomas More, who became the Lord Chancellor of England, also was willing to critique both civil and ecclesial authorities.

G. Within the Church, the greater learning and wealth allowed a great increase in building, art, music, and education. But there could also be a certain worldliness that set in.

1. The term Renaissance Popes generally refers to the 10 popes from Nicolas V (1447-55) to Leo X (1513 -1521).

- On the one hand, they were powerful leaders, defending the authority of the papacy and engaging in much construction.

- The great artwork, such as the construction of new St. Peter's and many other Roman churches, the art of Fra Angelico and Michelangelo, and the increased availability of religious works could increase piety.

- On the other hand, they were often very worldly, and even decadent. Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) in particular attracted much ridicule for his immoral life. He was followed by Pope Julius II (1503 – 1513), who was most known for his battles within the Papal States. And the increased power of governments and merchants could be a challenge to the independence of the Church.

2. Bishops likewise wielded great authority, but could often act more like wealthy nobles than churchmen.