

Light in the Middle Ages

Introduction: This is the urban legend of a Catholic Western Europe mired in poverty, disease, ignorance, superstition and Church corruption. Born in English Reformation rhetoric, this helped to create an assumption of Church history and Western history that would become common English and American under a different portrait of roughly 1,000 years of Western European history, from A.D. 500-1500. This medieval Christendom was engaged in rebuilding Western civilization after the collapse of Rome, while Christianizing the culture through passionate missionary work, a deep faith life, rich theological study and social leadership.

Discover the Bible-believing, Jesus-centered, morally pure Christianity of the Middle Ages. Superstitious peasants and relic-hawking clergy - if this says Medieval Christianity to you, then think again. Not only were those years filled with dynamic Catholic leaders and thinkers, but they flourished in times very like our own: an increasingly secular culture hostile to Christianity, threats to religious liberty, scandal in the Church, cultural degradation and more.

In Positively Medieval you'll encounter some of the leading figures of the time, men and women who not only passed on the torch of Christian faith, but also rebuilt society in the wake of the barbarian invasions. Their energetic response to very dark times will inspire you to meet today's challenges with the same smart, creative, clear-eyed confidence.

In my 30+ years of teaching Church history I have witnessed time and time again - and these times are among my favorite moments as a teacher - that my students, after picking up and reading medieval literature firsthand, are captivated by its relevance. Contrary to the typical narrative peddled by contemporary secular culture, sources reveal medieval Christianity to be intellectually inquisitive, spiritually vibrant, dynamic and world-affirming, sincerely held and culturally diverse. ...

Even more, I have found that history works best when its focus is on concrete individuals, real personalities, rather than a broad survey of dates, events and vague generalizations. This is why I have chosen to structure this book not so much chronologically or thematically, but around the lives of real persons - the lives of the saints.

The faithful men and women of the Middle Ages - those who passed on the Faith so heroically and at such great cost - still retain their power to inspire, to capture

imaginations, and to teach those willing to learn.

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church exerted enormous power over Europe. The Church influenced governments, waged wars and levied taxes. Although some actions, such as the Medieval Inquisition, are controversial today, the Catholic Church also established universities and hospitals, instigated positive social change and paved the way for economic growth that permanently changed European society.

Education: In 1079, Pope Gregory VII decreed that the Church would build cathedral schools, institutions designed to educate future members of the clergy. Their success led to the development of European universities in the 12th century, whose educational scope quickly broadened beyond religious training into medicine and law. The growth of universities meant that more men required preparatory education in Latin, which was mandatory in university educations at the time. To meet this need, the church also created primary education facilities that prepared men for university study. Through the creation of universities and institutions of primary education the Catholic Church spread literacy and promoted the growth of intellectual curiosity.

Hospitals: Until universities began to house medical facilities in the 12th century, most medical care in Europe occurred in Catholic monasteries. The church went on to found the university system, which provided facilities and care as well as training for physicians. It was also responsible for creating the European hospital system, which began in the 13th century when Pope Innocent III ordered establishment of a hospital in Rome. The hospital was so popular that it sparked the construction of hundreds of additional institutes across Europe that followed the same model. These new hospitals meant that medical care became accessible for nearly all European people for the first time.

Improved Economy: In 1095, Pope Urban II urged Europeans to declare war on the Middle East and recapture Jerusalem from the Muslims, beginning a series of Crusades that lasted until the 13th century. The Crusades were generally unsuccessful, but resulted in enormous economic changes in Europe. Change occurred because crusading was extremely expensive and required wealthy Europeans to spend vast amounts of money. To fund a crusade, churches and noblemen sold property and took loans. They also paid the lower classes for services. These actions resulted in a major redistribution of European wealth. At the same time, new trade routes through the Middle East, the formation of guilds and the creation of modern lending institutions led to the birth of modern economies.

and the formal of the middle class.

Care for the Poor: As the Crusades began at the end of the 11th century, commerce began to develop in Europe. In response, European society experienced the emergence of two new classes of people: the middle class and the extremely poor, who were often reduced to beg. Governments during this time attempted to ban poor people from public areas and institute vagrancy laws to keep beggars out of cities. In response, the Catholic Church moved to aggressively protect the poor, insisting they were entitled to basic rights. The Church attempted to protect these by exempting the poor from court fees in ecclesiastic courts and by providing free legal counsel for food, shelter and alms.

The Middle Ages were a time of enormous upheaval for Europeans and the Catholic Church. Social changes created by the rise European universities and the spread of the Black Death transformed the face of European society. In addition, Catholic policies regarding economics and the family were being rewritten for a new age, introducing new beliefs and practices to society.

Education: During the 12th century, a new concept called "scholasticism" emerged within the Catholic Church. Initially, the church disapproved of scholasticism, which it feared would undermine faith and promote heresy; however, its eventual acceptance led to the development of prominent scholars such as Thomas Aquinas who used logic and traditional philosophy to understand nature and the Bible. In the early Middle Ages, the church established cathedral schools to educate the clergy. These led to the establishment of the university system in Europe and to the early spread of literacy throughout the non-clerical population of Europe.

Women and the Family: It was the official policy of the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages that women were subservient to men in all things, although this was not always observed in practice. The church officially disapproved of sexuality even between married partners and attempt to legislate the days and seasons of the year when married couples could be intimate. Despite this, believers were strongly encouraged to reproduce as a means of strengthening the church. The Catholic Church established a policy forbidding divorce in the fifth century however, this doctrine conflicted with and was superseded by preexisting secular laws that allowed divorce in almost every European country.

Poverty: As society became increasingly stratified after the 11th century, Europeans began to become aware of a growing class of poor people. Some

governments denied legal protection to the poor, raising concern within the church. Catholic monastic factions felt poverty was a holy way of life and that feeding the poor worked against the will of God; however, a group known as canonists argued that it was the church's responsibility to care for those in need. This group began to fight for legal protection and to provide service for the poor, eventually leading to the creation of Europe's first hospitals and to a sense of responsibility for the poor within the church.

The Black Death: Terrible famines at the end of the 13th century paved the way for the Black Death, a catastrophic pandemic that killed millions of people throughout Europe. Casualties among the clergy were high, leaving the church with inexperienced and often corrupt leadership. The large-scale loss of life resulted in a shift in European cultural priorities away from the church and toward the growth of science and innovation among the laity. This shift, coupled with growing dissatisfaction regarding church corruption, eventually led to the Protestant Reformation and to the beginning of a new era in Europe.

The crusades, a series of European holy wars waged from the 11th to the 13th century, had an enormous impact on the European economy. The long-term effects of the crusades included the establishment of lending institutions across the continent, standardized methods of taxation and an increase in European trade.

Financing the Crusades

The cost of joining a crusade was crippling. Soldiers were expected to leave in groups and were required to finance their journey across a continent, a cost which was impossible for most to pay even after selling their lands and all personal goods. Stipends from the ruling class and the church relieved some of this burden, but most of the cost of the Crusades fell on the shoulders of the individuals and groups who participated. Nobility and the church responded to these costs by raising taxes and by pooling their resources. Individuals sold property and took loans to finance the journey.

Redistribution of Wealth: One of the most significant results of the crusades was a reduction of economic power in the church and the increased power of lower classes and middle class, who were known as the bourgeoisie. Peasants benefited from a higher demand on their products and from the availability of real estate. The newly-created middle class profited from collecting interest on loans, buying and selling property for the elite, and from providing transportation. The Church, which was obligated to provide interest-free loans due to policies on usury, and which had to liquidate assets and share their wealth with other crusaders, suffered a

reduction in power that allowed others in Europe to flourish.

Higher Quality of Life: Another major result of the crusades was the urbanization of Europe. Before the holy wars began, Europe's economy was centered around manorial estates, but the onset of the crusades marked the decline of feudalism and the rise of towns as the centers of trade and commerce. New access to the Middle East brought increased trade and a demand for new goods that drove inflation, but which also prompted an increase in European quality of life.

Economic Legacy: The crusades became a catalyst for permanent change in the European economy. The taxes nobles and the clergy levied during time provided the template for future taxation throughout Europe. The popularity of financing crusades through borrowing resulted in the formation of the continent's first credit institutions, stimulated the European economy and led to the growth of the middle class. Additionally, the demand for trade caused the reemergence of the town, which led to the creation of guilds. Guilds created standardized practices and the regulation of trade that would become centerpieces of modern economics.

The Crusades is the name given to a series of military campaigns during the Middle Ages in which Christian armies from Europe waged war against the Muslim Turks of the Holy Land (now Israel and Palestine). The stated objective was to re-establish European control over the sites considered holy by Christians, especially Jerusalem. The Crusades were prompted partly by religious motivations and partly by commercial and territorial ambitions.

Popularity of the Crusades: The Crusades were supported by all classes of society - both the nobles and the poor of Europe. The army of the First Crusade which started in 1096, consisted of between 60,000 and 100,000 men. New campaigns were launched sporadically over the next 15 years, with the Ninth (and final) Crusade starting in 1271. There even was a Children's Crusade in 1212, led by a French peasant named Stephen of Cloyes, that ended tragically for those who volunteered - some were sold as slaves and others died of hunger and disease.

Religious Reasons: There were powerful religious motivations for the Crusades. The Holy Land had been controlled by Muslims since the seventh century, and by the end of the 11th century this situation had become intolerable to some Christian leaders of Europe. Therefore, Byzantine Emperor Alexis appealed for help against the Muslim Turks, Pope Urban II made a speech in 1095 in which he "exhorted Christendom to go to war for the Sepulcher" (the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem). This was certainly a period of religious fervor in Europe. Many people went on

pilgrimages, there had been a strengthening of spirituality and some wanted to find a more active way of expressing their Christian faith. In this context, a Crusade has been compared to an "armed pilgrimage."

Economic and Commercial Reasons: There also were economic and commercial motivations for the Crusades. Europe had become prosperous, and this resulted in a desire for an expansion of trade. The middle classes, especially merchants, wanted to increase trade with the Muslims, bypassing Byzantine merchants. The Italian city states, which had gained both prosperity and naval power, were particularly interested in developing more trade with the East.

Territorial Reasons: Closely connected to the commercial reasons were territorial motivations. European prosperity, combined with growing military resources, resulted in a desire for territorial expansion. Nobles, especially among the Normans, wished to acquire new colonial possessions in the East. Also, because of improvements in agricultural productivity, more land was needed for cultivation by peasants. Such material motivations complemented the religious reasons that spurred the Crusaders.