Christianity
Part II
Christianity After Rome

• The collapse of the unified Roman Empire had a profound impact upon the direction and development of Christianity
• For many Christians, it was enormously traumatic; believe that the world is ending
• Christianity had become synonymous with Rome and Roman culture and society
• Roman culture will survive largely intact in the East – The Byzantine Empire
• The East is more urban, wealthy, and Greek speaking; can maintain Roman state, society
• West is more rural, agrarian, and poor; Also have new invaders – Germanic peoples
• Split of Roman Empire will lead to two distinct forms of Christianity; Catholic and Orthodox
The Church Fathers

- In the West, three figures emerged during the twilight of the western Empire
- These figures will provide the intellectual leadership for adapting Christianity to a post Roman world
- First figure is Ambrose of Milan (right) (340-397 AD)
- Asserted the independence of clergy from Roman state; autonomy and superiority
- Also wrote a book on pastoral care
The Church Fathers

- Next important figure is Jerome (right) (345-420 AD)
- Jerome was a brilliant and learned man; classical education
- A great admirer of classical literature
- Was an ascetic
- Lived as a hermit near Bethlehem
- During Jerome’s lifetime, an accepted Bible had been created
- But it was in Greek; West spoke Latin
- Jerome accumulated texts in Greek and Hebrew; translated into Latin
- Created the Vulgate Bible
The Church Fathers

• Most important of these figures was Augustine (right) (354 – 430 AD)
• The most important theologian for the Catholic church
• Most important theologian until Aquinas, Luther
• Converted to Christianity later in life
• Became Bishop of Hippo
• Prolific Writer, defender of Church, and opponent of heresy and paganism
• Wrote two great works: Confessions, City of God
• Principles of Augustinian thought:
  • Sin and Free Will
  • Importance of Grace
  • Justification of combating heresy with violence
• Christian rituals are Godly ordained
• Pagan philosophy a tool for understanding Christianity
The Germanic Peoples

• One large challenge for the course of Christianity in the West were the Germanic peoples
• Germanic peoples lived in Europe West and North of the Rhine River to parts of Central Asia
• Called Germanic because they each spoke a Germanic language and shared similar (but not identical) cultures
• Peoples include: Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Lombards, Franks, Viking peoples
• Some groups were deeply influenced by contact with Rome and were Christians – But Arian Christians
• Some groups were non-Christians; worshiped the Germanic Norse pantheon (Odin, Thor, Tyr, Freya, Frey, etc.)
• Trees, Plants, Forests, and the like were sacred to them
• This was a warrior culture; difficult time embracing much of the New Testament message
Medieval Catholicism

- Eventually, the Germanic peoples were converted
- This was not a quick process; gradual
- And it was never complete; elements of pre-Christian culture remained
- What we have is a process of syncretism
- The date of Christmas, Christmas trees, holly, ivy, certain saints, Easter imagery – They all reflect pre-Christian holdovers
- Christianity is now adapting to a new culture – just as it had done with Rome
The Pope

- Medieval Catholicism is defined by the emergence of the Popes
- Powerful Bishops in Rome had existed for many centuries; since Peter according to Catholic tradition
- But these Bishops were simply one of numerous powerful Bishops
- And Bishops were subservient to the Emperor
- Now there is no Emperor – New leadership
- The emergence of powerful Popes is a gradual process – took centuries
- Eventually Popes will emerge as the leaders of the Catholic Church in the West – Will claim to lead all Christians; even Eastern Orthodox
- Pope is the successor to St. Peter; God’s chosen representative
- Doctrine of Papal Infallibility; powers of Peter
- Will compete with Kings for political and spiritual power in Western Europe
- Popes sit at the top of a church hierarchy: Popes, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Parish Priests – Known as the secular clergy
The Religious Orders

- Religious Orders develop in both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians at the end of the Roman period
- But develop most fully in the Medieval period
- Another name for the religious orders is Monasticism – the formation of monasteries
- In the West, this tradition began with Benedict of Nursia (c.480 – 543)
- Benedict was a hermit; attracted a sizeable following, founded a monastery at Monte Cassino; wrote a Rule
- Benedict’s rule will become the guiding document for monks in the West
- In the 12th century, new types of religious orders will emerge – The Friars
- Friars are Mendicant orders; beg for a living
- Tend to live in cities
- Most important = Franciscans and Dominicans
- Religious orders are known as the regular clergy
The Cult of the Saints

- The Cult of the Saints developed during the Roman period, but became an integral part of Christian spirituality during the Middle Ages.
- A Saint is a person who was renowned for their piety and holiness in their life; often were a martyr for the faith.
- During the Middle Ages, people believed that the relics of Saints retained part of this power; focus of veneration.
- Also a belief that saints could act as intercessors on behalf of an individual.
- Saints were tangible spirituality for a largely illiterate body of faithful.
- The Cult of the Saints was one of the most important manifestations of faith in the medieval period.
- Both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Faiths utilized saints.
- Saints an important tool for conversion.
Spirituality in the Middle Ages

- During the Middle Ages, we have the codification of many Catholic doctrines, ideas, and practices
- To be a Christian is to do faith and works
- Works defined as sacraments, prayers, attending mass, festivals, penance, donations, charity, etc.
- Central form of worship is the Mass
- Mass in Latin; only upper clergy and nobility know Latin
- Latin is a mystery to parish priests, masses – Gives a mysterious, mystical quality to the mass
- Bible is in Latin; ability to preach and interpret the Bible is restricted to the clergy
- Emphasis on tradition – Catholic church emphasized that its ideas and authority rested not just on scripture, but Apostolic tradition
Spirituality in the Middle Ages

- Medieval period also an era of intense religious experimentation
- Intellectuals, priests, and scholars interested in spiritual questions
- Most famous movement of the period was Scholasticism; Scholasticism was an attempt to marry reason and faith; observable and the unseen
- Scholasticism utilized Aristotle to understand and interpret Christian doctrines and ideas
- Most famous scholastic was Thomas Aquinas
- On the other side of the spectrum were the mystics; Middle Ages saw much experimentation with mysticism
- Attempts to transcend this world and achieve a spiritual, physical union with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit
- Important to emphasize that these movement typically took place within the clergy; especially the regular clergy (monks/friars)
Eastern Orthodox Christianity

- Eastern Orthodox Church is the origin of the national churches of Eastern Europe that we see today (i.e. Greek, Russian, Serbian, etc.)
- Similar in practice and doctrine to Catholicism – albeit some prominent theological differences
- Originally Emperor at the head – Byzantine Empire maintained much of the Late Roman Imperial structure
- Similar ecclesiastical structure to West
- Important Bishops called Patriarchs; second in authority to Emperor; will emerge as even more important spiritual leaders after fall of Byzantines
- Language is Greek (but Old Church Slavonic in Eastern Europe)
- They have a different liturgical practice and calendar
- Priests are not celibate; Bishops, Archbishops, and Patriarchs are
Martin Luther

- Religion in Europe transformed by Martin Luther
- Luther led the Protestant Reformation in Europe
- Luther challenged the authority of the Pope and Catholic Church
- Luther disputed Catholic doctrines, practices, and organization
- Luther crafted a theology based on three principles: Justification by Faith, Scriptural Primacy, and Priesthood of all believers.
- Luther’s message divides Europe
The English Reformation

- England breaks from the Catholic Church, but for different reasons than European Protestants
- English Reformation due to needs and desires of Henry VIII
- England has a large population of Protestant sympathizers
- Henry VIII is not a Protestant in faith, but by necessity
- 1531: Head of English Church
- 1534: England officially separated
- English Reformation creates all sorts of problems for England
The English Reformation is the story of one family: the Tudors. The reformation began under Henry VIII. Henry was a devout Catholic but for political reasons became a Protestant. In terms of doctrine and organization, his English church was similar to Catholicism. Under his young son successor, Edward VI, the English church became more Protestant. Edward was succeeded by his sister Mary, a devout Catholic. She took England back to Catholicism and persecuted Protestants. Elizabeth, Mary’s sister, came to the throne next and took England back to Protestantism.
Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment

- Like the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution was a product of the Renaissance.
- Began with Nicolaus Copernicus (1473 – 1543); Copernicus argued for a heliocentric universe; ideas confirmed by Galileo (1564 -1642) and Johannes Kepler (1571 – 1630).
- Largest figure was Isaac Newton (1643 – 1727): Invented Calculus, theory of motion, gravity, speculation about light; created new view of the world.
- The Newtonian God; Prime Mover, Clock Work.
- Scientific Revolution rocked intellectual world of Europe.
- Called into question Biblical traditions; forced adaptations and explanations.
- Enlightenment builds upon the Scientific Revolution; A philosophical movement that emphasized reason, rationality, observation.
- Enlightenment thinkers challenged both Catholic and Protestant teachings.
- Led to a movement called Deism.
- Enlightenment posed a challenge to Christians throughout the world in the 19th and 20th centuries.