

Faith Seeking Understanding: God and Philosophy in the Middle Ages

Magistrates, Monks, and Missionaries: How Christendom Emerged
as the New Social Order

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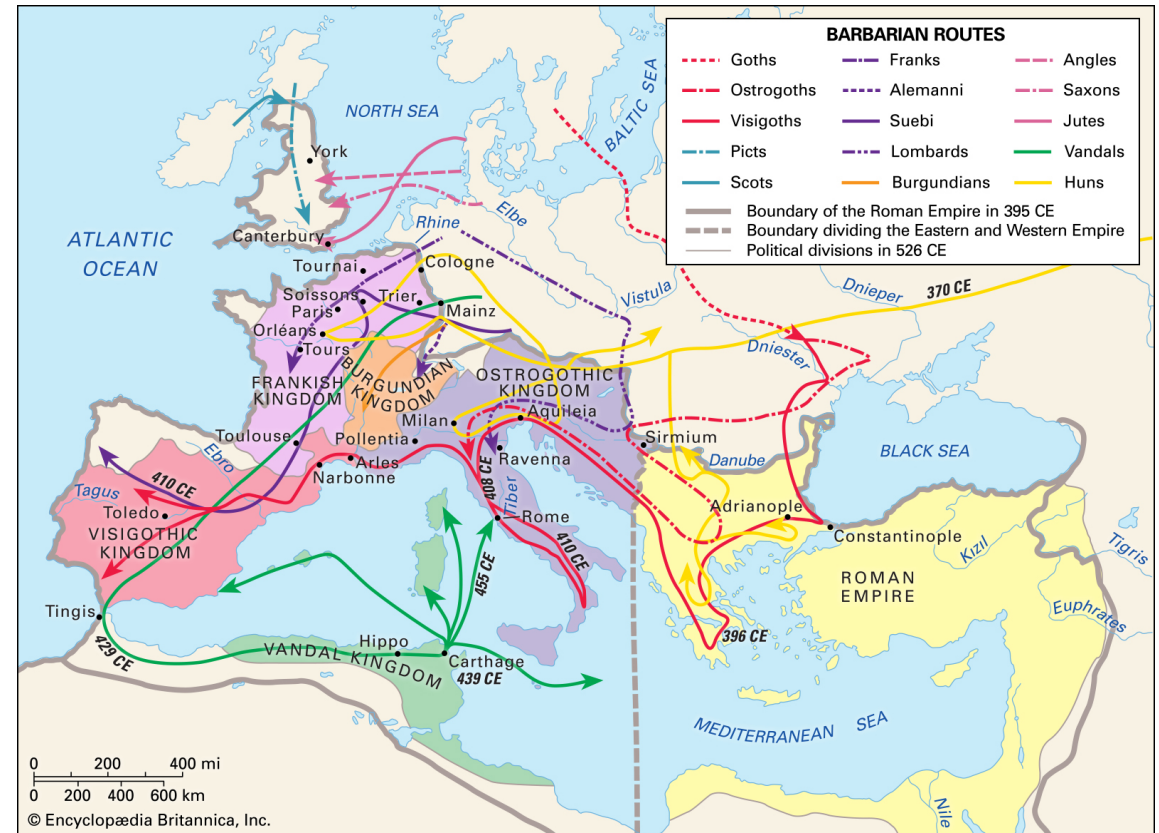


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The 'Dark' 5th-7th Centuries

- The Barbarian invasions of the 5th century fragmented Roman society politically, economically, and culturally.
 - Angles, Saxons, and Jutes would invade and settle Brittany.
 - Franks in modern day France and Belgium.
 - Visigoths in Spain.
 - Lombards in Northern Italy.
 - Ostrogoths in Italy, Austria and the Dalmatian Coast under Theodoric I.
 - Vandals in Spain and Northern Africa, until the Arab conquest of 660.
- The prolonged would have long-term, wide-reaching devastation on Western culture and society.



The 'Dark' 5th-7th Centuries

- One of the first things to collapse was trade-routes. Trade declined massively.
- Roads were no longer maintained and routes between provinces disappeared. Knowledge of how to build roads disappeared, and as a result the primary mode of travel was by river.
- The lack of currency made purchasing difficult. Money began to be minted locally, which shows the very limited nature of trade (Le Goff, p. 26).
- Unable to move or trade their goods, people abandoned their fields. Large tracts of land became uninhabited. The countryside was divided up by large, unnavigable terrains.



The 'Dark' 5th-7th Centuries

- Towns and cities in particular suffered. During the invasions, these had often been looted by barbarian forces.
- Outbreaks of plague from 542 onward devastated the population. Mortality rates in Europe would exceed the birth rate throughout most of next 4 centuries.
- This amount of population decline brought with it a further contraction in the economy because of a massive loss of knowledge and skilled labor.
- It became difficult to secure even the basic necessities of life. Cities without navigable rivers collapsed.
- Taxes, which were rising to pay for the growing needs of government, were also most enforceable around urban centres.



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The 'Dark' 5th-7th Centuries

- Unable to secure food and harassed by tax collectors, masses moved to the country to live as tenant farmers. This was a huge win-fall for the landed aristocracy, but had the effect of massively deepening poverty.
- Salvian: "[T]hose . . . who have lost their houses and their lands following an act of brigandage or when they have been driven out by the tax-collectors they take refuge in estates belonging to the great and become the colony of the rich . . . the rich begin to consider those whom they have welcomed as strangers who did not belong to them as their own property. These genuinely free people are transformed into slaves" (Le Goff, p. 24).



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The Church in the Early Middle Ages

- The status of the church in this period was uncertain.
- Lay religion at this time would have been uneducated, syncretistic, and highly superstitious. It was not uncommon for their Christianity to be blended with local legends or Roman mythologies.
- Because the population was so diffuse, many places lacked clergy. Outside of urban centres, seeing a priest once a year to receive the Eucharist would have made you a pretty active Christian.
- Bishoprics in many places went decades without being filled. In Périgueux, Bordeaux, Geneva, Toulon and other places, more than a century passed (Le Goff, p. 35).



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The Church in the Early Middle Ages

- Some regions reverted back to Paganism. Substantial portions of England had a Christian witness in the 4thC, but after the collapse of the Empire return to paganism in the 5th-6thC.
- Many of the invading tribes were pagan, and ones that weren't were had converted to Arianism.
- In the 7thC, the Latin West was under threat of Muslim invasion from Spain. It would not be until the Battle of Poitiers in 732 AD that their movement into Europe would be stopped.
- The Eastern Empire was ruled by kings under the influence of monophysite heretics, those who denied the two natures of Christ as described in the Chalcedonian Creed (451 AD).



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The Church in the Early Middle Ages

- Yet as institutions receded across Europe, this left an enormous social vacuum which the church filled almost by default of being *local*.
- Priests and bishops were often educated (to some degree). If they belonged to the aristocracy, they had wide-reaching influence.
- They were often enlisted into various kinds of community-building, simply because there was no one else competent to do it.
 - Political — often negotiating with tribal leaders on behalf of their communities.
 - Social — advocacy for and distribution of resources to the poor.
 - Legal — acting as a judge through the enforcement and upholding of local law.
 - Military — organising locals to defend their towns against invaders. St David (right) lead and directed military campaigns against invading Saxons.



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The Ostrogothic Kingdom

- King of the Ostrogoths, Theodoric I had a Roman education in Constantinople. After attacking Constantinople, he was enlisted by Emperor Zeno to retake Italy from Odoacer, which he did in 493.
- He was Arian, which by this point had become largely a German folk religion. But he showed deference to the pope and maintained a policy of religious tolerance.
- Theodoric was a skilled administrator and enjoyed a great deal of success, surrounding himself with competent aristocrats of Old Italian blood: Boethius and Cassiodorus.
- These two, who had received an education in the Roman tradition, would pass down much of the works we now have extant from the classical Roman and Greek cultures.
- Boethius would provide Latin translations and commentaries on many of the most important Greek texts.



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The Ostrogothic Kingdom

- Cassiodorus (right) intended to create a university similar to the Platonic school, but instead founded a monastery that preserved ancient knowledge through transcription. He also devised a curriculum for the study of the liberal arts and theology which would serve as the basis for education in much of the Latin West.
- When Theodoric married the sister of Clovis and became guardian of a Spanish Visigothic king, Zeno recognised Clovis as the legal ruler of Frankia to minimise his influence (Cantor, p. 107).
- When Justinian became emperor in the East and declared his commitment to Chalcedon, many saw the writing on the wall and threw in with the Pope. Theodoric accused Boethius of being part of this plot and had him killed.
- The Ostrogothic Empire would collapse shortly after Theodoric's death (526) when Justinian launched his campaign to reunite the Empire.



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The Frankish Kingdom

- By the late 5thC, the church was “the only political, economic, and more power that still existed throughout Gaul” (Cantor, p. 113), and was proving a competent partner in the work of governing.
- That is why Clovis (481-511), leader of the Frankish tribes and head of what became the Merovingian line, was baptised Catholic (along with his whole army!) in 496 AD.
- This gave Clovis a distinct advantage over other Germanic occupiers who were a small minority of the population (about 5%) and mostly Arian.
- This scene is frequently depicted in Medieval French art (right), where Clovis is seen as a new Constantine, baptised not only by the Archbishop of Rheims, but the Holy Spirit.



Sacral Kingship

- One of the features of the ancient world was the analogy between human and divine government. Kings are like God(s), in that they exercise power over the lives of the people they govern.
- But while understanding kingship as a divine anointing invested it with a sense of authority, it took on a mystical, extra-historical character:
- “One result of this massive dependence on the supernatural was that the individual was of little account. The individual was swallowed up in his community or . . . in his office” (Southern, *Western Society*, p. 33).
- This would allow for tremendous amounts of political change, without massive disruption to the institution itself. But it would also tie the religious and political authorities to one another, so that the two were distinct but inseparable.



Monasticism

- Monasticism, which started in the eastern half of the kingdom, had become a fixture of Christianity by the 5th C.
- Some were very ascetic (esp. Egypt & Ireland), fleeing from the world and punishing the body as a means of greater mindfulness of God.
- But Benedict's *Rule for Monks* became popular for regulating these communities, in large part due to its moderation and flexibility.
- Benedictine monasteries were self-sustaining, socially-diverse communities, ruled by an abbot. They were very disciplined and maintained a rigorous daily schedule:
 - 4 hrs corporate prayer/worship.
 - 4 hrs personal prayer/contemplation.
 - 6 hrs physical labor.
 - 10 hrs eating & rest.



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Monasticism

- These communities existed for prayer and contemplation, but took in many who were illiterate. They thus developed schools to teach the brothers what they needed to know to be able to say the Latin mass.
- Education typically consisted in the learning of Latin, the liberal arts, and the intensive study of sacred texts.
- The monastery established by Cassiodorus would copy sacred texts. Monasteries all over Europe would create *scriptoria* — rooms for copying sacred texts, the printing presses of the middle ages!
- For more than 500 years, Monasteries were the only viable schools in the West: “At a conservative estimate 90 percent of the literate men between 600 and 1100 received their instruction in a monastic school” (Cantor, p. 153).



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The Papacy

- Belief in the primacy of Rome had been a conviction in the church since the 3rdC. This was advanced under the papacy of Gelasius I (492-496), who argued the Roman episcopate was “first among equals”.
- Gregory the Great (right) was the real turning point for the Medieval papacy.
- He was a Benedictine monk who was very reluctant to take St Peter’s throne. He wrote a life of St Benedict that remained hugely popular throughout the middle ages.
- His achievements were largely administrative and diplomatic. But he sought reforms to pastoral care, and consolidated the spiritual and political authority of the Papacy as the universal bishop.



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The Papacy

- He sent Augustine of Canterbury to Kent on a mission to (re-)convert the English in 595. As Bede records it in his *Ecclesiastical History*, this effort was wildly successful, establishing some of the best monastic schools in Europe, such as Bede's own St Paul's monastery in Jarrow, Northumbria.
- This eventually led to consolidation of the Latin with the Celtic churches, which mostly operated independently and had begun converting Northern England and Scotland.
- Gregory instituted reforms to the church calendar, unifying observance of key holy days, and incorporating local saints and observances into Latin Christianity.
- He created a cooperative alliance with the Merovingian dynasty, offering administrative assistance to the Frankish kingdom, which would prove pivotal with the rise of the Carolingian line.



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