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Still, although the Christian schema was not much of a guide to medieval behavior–being more a set of rituals than a code of ethical integrity, it inhibited appreciation of the secular di-mension of life, and it was this inhibition which actually char-acterized medieval stupidity. This condition was more noticeable among the intelligencia, such as it was, which had been indoctrinated with theology, than among the people or the prag-matic rulers of the Church or states. Certainly the political be-havior of medieval leaders was clearly shaped more by some eternal, transcendent power ethic4 than by either a sense of Christian virtue or a inherent desire to understand what they were doing.

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Medieval Stupidity

James F. Welles

Medieval stupidity should be easy to characterize: It should be Christian stupidity. However, a look at the historical record indicates much less Christian behavior than belief[1] during the Middle Ages so stupidity in this era of religious violence[2] was more a function of the Church reacting to medieval realities as a ruling rather than Christian institution.

Still, although the Christian schema was not much of a guide to medieval behavior being more a set of rituals than a code of ethical integrity,[3] it inhibited appreciation of the secular dimension of life, and it was this inhibition which actually characterized medieval stupidity. This condition was more noticeable among the intelligencia, such as it was, which had been indoctrinated with theology, than among the people or the pragmatic rulers of the Church or states. Certainly the political behavior of medieval leaders was clearly shaped more by some eternal, transcendent power ethic[4] than by either a sense of Christian virtue or a inherent desire to understand what they were doing.

Because of this inhibition, medieval stupidity came in two forms, both of which were malfunctional expressions of the interaction of the Church with its environment. One of these was the general lack of intellectual activity in all fields but theology, in which scholastic analysis was eventually carried to hairsplitting extremes. The other was the moral corruption of the Church as its emerging, centralized leadership dealt with the evolving practicalities of medieval life.

Initially, these practicalities were shaped by the Roman Empire's collapse, which marked the beginning of the Dark Ages (ca.500-1000). In the early sixth century, Europe was basically a giant slum, with political fragmentation compounding social disorder. It was not really barbaric just extremely demoralized, with daily life functioning at a very low level physically, morally and intellectually. Only very slowly did people rally around the Cross and regain a sense of community.

Not only was Europe demoralized, but it was confused as well. In the absence of an organized administrative system and in the presence of generally increasing ignorance, social and political chaos posed problems which were solved piecemeal by practical people without theorists and by pragmatic priests without theologians.[5] Indeed, monks both helped and hindered intellectuals: They kept reading alive but at the cost of questioning. "Don't' Ask" Benedict (520) all but prevented reading from promoting discussion or debate, since, according to him, "No one should presume to ask a question about reading or anything else....."[6] In a nutshell, monasteries evolved from Epicurean gardens[7] and were the intellectual opposites of Greek academies which had embraced and encouraged inquiry.[8]

Amidst this repression, there were nevertheless some glimmerings of moral if not intellectual leadership and ability, notably in the person of Gregory the Great (540-604)[9]. Gregory was particularly notable as the inheritor of the Roman State. He lived during the darkest age of Rome when memories and traditions of greatness still existed in an environment of death, grief and isolation. It was under those conditions that he fathered medieval Christianity and the civilization that arose in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. He did so as the "Missionary pope" who championed the dignity of Rome against the worldly power of the Byzantine Empire not by military force, financial influence or political intrigue but by moral authority. Perhaps because he did not want to be pope and made an effort not to be appointed,[10] he saw his position as an opportunity to assert ethical authority in a world of scheming machinations, and one of his noblest if least influential pronouncements was that people are created free and it was morally just to restore them to the freedom to which they had been born.[11] Basically, he made religion, rather than politics or economics, the foundation of Christianity, and after him, the Western world looked to Rome for moral guidance.[12]

Unfortunately, Gregory was a bit too otherworldly for those who came after him. His whole schema was dominated by a supernatural concern for a super worldly Roman order. Not only was he remarkably ignorant in many ways (especially for a pragmatic, successful world leader, which he was[13]), but he could not imagine that the ethical authority he gave the Church would be abused for worldly purposes because he expected the world to end before such corruption could occur.[14] In fact, his reign marked the moral apex of Catholicism the point from which the Church gradually descended into corrupting worldly affairs and took on the schizoid nature of an organization whose leaders became debased by reality while its "The ideology" became ever more unworldly.

Regrettably, Gregory's ignorance was due partially to his morality, which was opposed to anyone's intellect. He promoted the liturgy[15] and believed prayer to be magical, welcomed superstition and frowned on curiosity,[16] which, by the end of the Middle Ages became a mortal sin.[17] As Luther would later conclude,

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faith alone was good enough for God, and it must be an unquestioning faith leaving no room for doubt. Unanimity of belief was essential and assumed in such a world, and, indeed, the word "Catholic" is based on the Greek word (*katholikos*) for "Universal"[18] as in universal belief. It did not matter if doctrine was incomprehensible since reasonable proof was unnecessary. In fact, it helped if belief was rooted in fear rather than reason since anxiety rather than understanding was the best motivation for escaping hell[19] if not going to heaven.

This was Gregory's theological legacy and his contribution to the Dark Ages. If the faith he bequeathed was one of fear and hatred of the natural world, it worked in that it held Europe together.[20] Eventually, faith would yield to reason, but, like the Romans before them who had believed in nothing more than themselves, the medieval priests stayed the course for 1,000 years with faith as their signature identity. Nor was it to be a questioning faith: to question was a step from skepticism, which was a step from heresey.[21]

Gregory personified the moral purity of institutional Christian faith, but it was a purity in eternal conflict with worldly knowledge and behavior necessary for survival. In the face of that conflict, the Church–being the guardian of dogma from which it took and to which it added nothing refused to change:[22] Being perfect, it recognized no need for nor had the capacity to reform and even to question much less appeal any decision made by the Church was heretical.[23] Beyond the perfect Church, however moral God was, He was not a God of law and light who welcomed the pursuit of truth, beauty, practicality nor knowledge, which, according to Paul, would lead to the sin of pride.[24] Faith in that kind of God would later be based upon a faith in humanity, but if there was one thing people in the Middle Ages did not believe in, it was themselves.[25]

With the passing of Gregory, the history of the Church became that of a structured organization gradually emerging with a codified, quasifunctional doctrine recognizable as an institutionalized religion.[26] An unconscious compromise between the limitations of Christian theology and the needs of the Church evolved as popes and priests worked to further their worldly influence while also attempting to convince the faithful to abide by the Holy Word. In order to make Christianity ever more appealing, they carried on the venerable Pauline tradition of sacrificing the gospel according to Jesus for the sake of popularity, so an already adulterated religion became further cheapened and inflated as rites and symbols became material and vulgar. Meanwhile, morality became formalized on a firm financial footing, and purgatory experienced the first real estate boom in history.[27]

Taken together, canny interpretations of Scripture and necessary rationalizations of ceremony became the basis for medieval theology and provided a theoretical framework for life in the Middle Ages. Fundamental to the Catholic schema was "Free will", despite the fact that Ephesians 5 stipulated that choosing the chosen was predetermined. Free Will nevertheless prevailed because it meant that people were morally responsible for sinning and thus needed the Church for salvation.[1]

However, as an ideology, Christian theology was more effective in keeping people from thinking about themselves and their lives than in regulating their behavior. An intellectual vacuum was promoted by the fanaticism and superstition which prevailed amongst the clergy, who thought secular learning wicked. Everyone truly believed in the theoretical Christian schema, which, as the Age of Belief progressed, became increasingly theoretical and detached from reality, with the only certainties being death, Gods' judgment, heaven and hell[28] and taxes. At best, medieval thought was metaphorical and allegorical rather than logical and rational. As for life in general, it was at best "Static",[29] with anything like progress so slow as to be imperceptible. If the soaring gothic cathedral is now viewed as representing the age of practicality sans mathematicians, that is because we do not have their collapsed failures to dwell on.[30]

Actually, the Church based its overweening power not only on the general idea that it provided the standard by which people thought they should live and die but also on the more specific notion that the clergy was necessary for the sacraments[2]. Thus, despite or because of how people indulged their passions on earth, most of them assumed a priest would determine whether they would spend eternity in heaven or hell. If a reprobate repented and confessed and the proper ceremony were performed, he went to heaven after suffering a while in purgatory. A priest could shorten this time by saying masses for the repentant and was willing to do so for a suitable fee,[31] but just why the holy Fathers would not do so out of Christian compassion[32] was not made clear.

This was the medieval schema. It was not just an official creed but a firm belief genuinely held by everyone priests, princes and people. It was this that made the clergy superior to the princes and popes more powerful than the generals. It granted an authority limited only by divisions among the priests and protests from the people,[33] and it was symbolized for the age by the Virgin Mary.

Mary enthralled medieval minds but to minimal practical effect.[34] She began her career as a mother and became a myth. In the Gospels, she is hardly

[1] This puts Christianity on a collision course with the behavioral sciences which are based on the assumption that everything–including human behavior–is caused.

[2] Baptism excepted.

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mentioned–but as a "Young woman", the word for which was deliberately mistranslated to mean "Virgin".[35] She became revered because the ancient world had long worshiped a Great Mother in the loving, sorrowful, Egyptian goddess Isis.[36] Yielding to popular demand to make women theologically respectable, divines at the Council of Ephesus in 431 doomed Mary to perpetual virginity by "Interpreting" the gate of a sanctuary described in Ezekiel 44:2 to be her holy vagina.[37] As a celestial celebrity embraced by the lowly and theoretical, she had surprisingly limited practical impact on behavior. As reigning queen of the Middle Ages, she dominated mighty warriors without influencing their conduct except to provide justification for the bloody excesses they committed in her holy name. Further, she failed to raise her daughters from their inferior status: Legally, women were not people, and because of their frailty, wife beating was legal.[38] (Go figure!)

While Christian theology evolved to declining practical effect during the Middle Ages, the Church did change in both attitude and structure. Originally, members of the clergy perceived themselves as temporary caretakers of an earthly way station on the road to the eternal hereafter. However, as the years passed, priests became ever more effectively involved in ministering to the needs of people in this world and increasingly aware of the powerful role they played as participants in the here and now. As the attitude of the clergy thus changed, a superstructure developed within the Church over and above the local clergy, and to the eventual detriment of the Super church, its medieval leaders became, if anything, too worldly. In fact, the world took over the Church as its leaders ignored Christian principles and surrendered their moral independence to self centered practicality if not indulgence.

Actually, the Church gradually became a gigantic, successful worldly kingdom not only because it was lost to theology but also because it was better organized and more extensive than any other political entity in Europe at the time. During the Middle Ages, Christianity provided the ruling (if misleading) ideology, while the Church became the ruling institution and the clergy the ruling elite. All learning and wisdom, such as they were, were derived from God,[39] concentrated in the Church and used to extend the power of the self promoting clergy.[3]

Thus, the Church became the first great corporation in history, providing the public with a product it wanted (eternal happiness in the next life) at a reasonable price (financial support in this one). As both its power and wealth grew, theologians busied themselves fashioning rationalizations out of Christian ideals not only for political but for financial policies as well. In this regard, they were more successful than convincing since there always remained at the heart of the Church a discrepancy between what the clergy practiced and priests preached.

Nevertheless, nothing could shake the faith of the people in Catholicism. In fact, the greatest tribute to medieval piety and stupidity was that regardless of what clergy did and said, their unworthiness and corruptibility never compromised the sanctity of the Church. Although priests were considered especially unlikely to get to heaven, the Church as an institution remained inviolate. Contempt and even hatred which the people felt for the corrupt clergy were never transposed to the idealized Church.

While theologians kept the medieval mind in slavish subjugation, the Church provided the people a defense against all oppression but its own and that of the nobility. Actually, the clergy's image and influence were not only protected but enhanced by the secular rulers, whom the people knew primarily as inflictors of injustice. As the people suffered underfoot, they found their only consolation in religion, which offered them the possibility of a better time in the next life if they obediently toed the line in this one.[40]

Naturally, not everyone would to get to heaven. In fact, the gloomy forecast of the medieval Church was that most souls would suffer a fate worse than feudalism in the next life. Only those who retained a childlike, thoughtless innocence would find joy in the hereafter. Faith, not knowledge or wisdom, would lead to eternal bliss,[4] which became forever coupled with ignorance.[41] Further, knowledge was threatening in that too much of it among common people could lead to discontent which would make God and his minions uneasy.[42]

To their credit, priests did what they could to promote both faith and virtue by trying to calm, tame and civilize the medieval soul, which was still semi barbaric and as committed to blasphemy as piety. People in the Middle Ages loved gaud and spectacles, fighting and adventure, fantasy and romance. They lived a decerebrate life vividly and intensely in stark contrasts of blacks and whites. Not only did they live in dichotomies but were delightfully inconsistent never never or always doing anything[43] but loosely adhering to oxymoronic combinations of pious superstitions mouthed by devoted heretics.[44] They were happily adapted to the "Sin now, repent later" policy of the Church and unconcerned with either heavy theology or the elaborate rules which the Church dutifully constructed and everyone solemnly forgot. They therefore tended to indulge themselves in open defiance of the

[3] Royal courts were also regarded as seats of learning where neophytes would develop good character. (Burns, R.)

[4] Epicurean worldly pleasure was to be avoided, however, because of the philosophy's nonChristian doctrine of the mortal soul. (Greenblatt. p. 101.) This is the basis for acetic Christianity–soul searching, etc.

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Ten Suggestions[45] upon which society was supposedly founded and salvation allegedly depended since they figured they could enjoy this life and then smugly 'fess and pay up just before the end.[46]

Although Christianity provided the unifying ideology of the age, greed was the common corrupter. It was naked and unabashed among the mighty and rivaled pride as the second most popular sin. Of course, it was noticeable as a corrupter of the clergy and nobility because they had power and espoused high ideals: For example, during the latter Middle Ages, in open defiance of their cogdis Christian vows, Franciscan friars became notorious for their greed and fraud.[47] On the other hand, the people at least appeared to be less corruptible than their leaders but probably only because they were relatively powerless to effect their desires, seldom professed impractical pretensions and are basically unheard of or from.

With Christianity the unifying belief and corruption the common practice, the symbol of medieval civilization really should have been not just the Virgin but the Virgin drenched in gold and blood for just as the clergy corrupted religion, the nobility corrupted chivalry. As a typically feudal contradiction to Christianity, chivalry was a secular code of ritualized violence for the privileged and powerful. It made looting and the shedding of blood honorable by institutionalizing fighting for the love of fighting and perhaps for worldly gain but certainly not for ladies, God or any higher much less religious ideal.[48]

While the clergy preyed on those who prayed, knights imposed themselves with impunity upon anyone too weak to resist. In so doing, they demonstrated the corrupting effects of unbridled power as well as their noble indifference to human suffering. Medieval chronicles are replete with accounts of knightly greed, lust and cruelty as peasants were robbed, raped and slaughtered by those who had sworn to protect them. Knights simply had more scornful contempt than Christian love for the wretchedly poor serfs who labored to support them.[49]

On a good day, a good knight might hear Mass in the morning, rob a Church in the afternoon, beat the wife he had sworn to cherish in the evening and drink himself into debauchery at night.[50] Subsequent ages would somehow idealize such conduct into romantic myths, but knights of old were about as chivalrous as members of our modern motorcycle gangs.[51]

By the eighth century, Europe was regarded by the Byzantines and Arabs as an intellectual and cultural backwash,[52] but in the west, the myth that the ancient world had not ended prevailed. First, Rome had not fallen, then Charlemagne (800-814) had restored it. If he had, it was a most unusual empire, as it had neither cities nor roads, government nor laws, army nor institutional organization of any form except the Church. However, that alone was enough to legitimatize the fiction and make Europe more cosmopolitan and international until any time up to the formation of the struggling EU.[53]

If Charlemagne (aka Carolus) could not revive the reality of the Roman Empire, at least he benefitted from the tradition of the Caesars. By the end of the eighth century, the mentality of Europe had sunk to a level at which creative political thinking beyond legal fictions was impossible and speculation unknown, so no one had the ability to conceive of and organize any new political system. The need was certainly there, but the old *idée fixe* of an Empire blocked the development of any other practical ideas about political institutions. The tradition of the Roman Empire and Emperors remained the ideal, schematic model of European unity so when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor in 800, Western Civilization began a repetition of the dreary, misconceived failures of the past.[54]

Certainly as a Church ordained Emperor, Charlemagne was anything but holy. He was a vigorous barbarian whose longterm political aspirations and cultural ambitions were foiled by the endurance of the Church and the turmoil of the age. A magnificent, immoral genius, he was politically allied with the Church but unbound by piety to it.[5]

Nor did Charlemagne "Get" Christianity. His conquests were in the cause of forced evangelism rather than the spirit of Jesus. He perceived himself as bringing the Gospel to stubborn unbelievers who needed to be saved not only from their sins but from their own inability to listen or unwillingness to hear i.e., stupidity. After a costly campaign against the Saxons in the early 780's, he ordered 4,500 Saxon prisoners massacred in good Christian fashion. Any unbaptized Saxon would die as would anyone who stole from a church, did violence to a priest or indulged in Saxon rites.[55] Fortunately, an advisor prevailed upon him to rescind the death penalty but this was done out of a sense of political expediency rather than humane compassion. His duty was to bring not merely salvation but right doctrine to the Western world,[56] and if Christ was lost somewhere on the road to Aachen, who but God was to know much less care?

For their part, the popes needed imperial protection, as papal elections had degenerated into disorderly squabbles among contending factions. Officially, the Church had all but abandoned Jesus and had assumed the task of creating a heaven for the clergy on earth. To do so, it had become a political

[5] Although Charlemagne never learned to write, he promoted education (Collins, P. p. 371.) by touting education as necessary for anyone who wanted to please God or the king. (Wickham 71) He did possess enough intellect to spark the "Carolingian renaissance",which included innovations in art, music, architecture and calligraphy. (Bauer. 2010. 389f.)

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body which used its spiritual leverage to further its designs for worldly domination[57] and financial gain.

During Charlemagne's lifetime, it had seemed a new political order was emerging, but all that remained after his death was an old theory and an impractical empire. His son, Louis the Pious, reigned during two minor military defeats in Spain in 827 which were construed as indicating Divine displeasure and induced moral panic. The body politic was in such disarray that Louis actually gave up hunting. The moral crisis was attributed to sin specifically perjury, pride, hatred, neglect of Sunday as a day of rest and confiscation of Church property. The Franks needed to repent, and in 829, Church councils called for penance from the top down, meaning the royal court, which was the moral center of the Frankish universe. The result was that Louis's sons revolted in 830 and again in 833. In the showdown, his army melted away and joined the boys. After they fell out, Louis returned, and the whole mess was attributed to the devil.[58]

The empire soon disintegrated under the tutelage of successors, whose cognomens the Bald, the Stammerer, the Simple and the Fat tell all, and the chaos that followed the demise of Chalemagne's legendary Roman Empire was worse than the demoralization that had been occasioned by the barbarization and decay of the real one. For the next eleven hundred years, emperors would come and go to no appreciable effect but to maintain the form and dysfunction of a phoney empire.[59]

As for the substance of phoniness, today's Saint John Lateran was the site, in 897, of the "Cadaver Synod" the most macabre and demented incident of the sordid history of the papacy. The cadaver was that of pope Formosus (891-896), which had been exhumed and placed on trial for heresy at the order of his mentally unstable successor Stephen VI, who screamed and raged at his propped up predecessor. Although the charge was trivial, the verdict was a foregone conclusion, and the victim was ceremoniously unpoped.[60]

Overcoming such base theatrics, an idealized memory the image of Charlemagne survived as an inspiration for Chistiandom. In 962, the German king Otto once more restored the Roman Empire. It was nonetheless holy for being opposed by the popes,[6] who claimed their own temporal supremacy based on a forged document the "Donation of Constantine". This fraud served the Church for five centuries, but the unholy Roman Empire lasted in name until 1806[61] by which time it finally had been acknowledged (by Voltaire) as neither holy, nor Roman nor an empire.[62] Otherwise, it was doing just fine.

Despite the restoration of the Empire, the tenth century, like the one that had gone before it, was one of general disorder, as the pendulum which swings between materialism and morality clearly favored the former. Calls by cleric/diplomat Liut prand of Cremona for Italian unity anticipating Machiavelli by 500 years and even a European community aside,[63] politically, it was an era of struggles for power, lawless wars and treachery as neither emperors nor kings could bring order to the anarchy of their nominal vassals.[64] Europe was a sprinkling of nobles theoretically subordinate to but in fact independent of and ever ready to war on their kings, each other or anyone else as resources permitted and occasion required.

This general disorder was also clearly reflected in the disorganization of the Church. Only the monastic priests remained aloof and maintained any semblance of austere if impotent Christian morality. Wherever Christianity came in contact with the real world, reality won and tainted the clergy, which became violent, immoral and worldly to the point of universal decadence and corruption.[65] In 966, Bishop Raherius of Verona complained of priests "who....beget sons and daughters by adulterous intercourse ...belch yesterday's drunkenness and excesses....are busy with continual law suits, who burn with greed, who waste away in hate and envy".[66]

In Rome, the papacy was completely controlled by the local aristocracy and hit its nadir in John XII (955-964), who, as an eighteen year old testosterone driven lout, led street gang assaults on hapless citizens[67] while further debasing his office with debauched orgies at the Lateran,[68] which he converted into a brothel. In this regard, John personified the Roman decadence of the era which had deteriorated to the point that to call someone a "Roman" was an insult implying he was dishonest, untrustworthy, disloyal and devious[69] if not religious.

All things considered, the year 1000 marked the lowest depth to which Western Civilization sank, the end of the Dark Ages and the beginning of a progressive if inconsistent improvement in civilization which lasted until the invention of the trench in 1914.[70] This improvement was generally characterized by and attributable to peace, the development of commerce and moral reform (with the latter factors continuing to act throughout the medieval era until the success of capitalism induced the Renaissance and the failure of the Church produced the Reformation). Wars gradually subsided as the conquests of Western Europe by Muslims and northern barbarians waned and then ceased. Concurrently and just as gradually, the nordic hordes had been Christianized as they overran civilization, so by the eleventh century, there were no more tribes or races left to be conquered by the religion of the land they invaded.

[6] It was gratuitously exalted to the status of Holy by Frederick I in the twelfth century.

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As peace descended and trade improved, an impetus for moral reform in Western Civilization itself began in and spread from the monasteries to the community at large. Unworldly friars and monks promoted literacy and revived and disseminated the Christian ethic they had protected and nurtured during the Dark Ages. Earnestly, they now set out to help people live in accordance with Christian principles. No longer just an institution which baptized infants, the Church more and more to determined how people lived and died.[71]

Ironically, this reform movement was qualified and limited by the hierarchy because in the eleventh century, there was a deliberate movement to separate the clergy from the laity. This reorganization of the Church was due largely to the efforts of Gregory VII (alias Hildebrand). Up to this point (i.e., 1073), the Church was loosely knit, with local clergy in touch with the people. Gregory worked to promote the image of the priest as an uncorrupted moral model while centralizing Church authority in the papacy. Although he was to a degree successful in both respects, as his reorganization of the clergy progressed, contact with the people was characterized less by the animating spirit of Christ than by a false standard of "Efficiency" imposed by discipline.[72] Further, his program for moral reform was tainted by an astute awareness of worldly power and gradually led to a conflict between pope and Emperor over the role and control of the clergy.[73] Matters came to something of a head in 1058, when two claimants to the papacy settled their dispute in a most Christian way: they went to war with each other.[74]

Generally, the squabble over investitures made every prince in Western Europe suspicious of bishops, who were perceived as agents of a foreign power. These suspicions were reinforced as the expanding political role of the papacy required increasing demands for money. Even by the thirteenth century, it was said that the priests were bad men who were always hurting for money.[75]

Thus did the Church on a grand scale follow the path priests had trod to corruption some five hundred years before. It seemed that Christianity could remain a moral force only if hidden away in monasteries. When the individual priest or the Church at large presumed to deal with the world, Christianity suffered. In the case of the Church, the powers it exercised beyond its spiritual functions corrupted it. As it took full advantage of the confidence the people had in it and the extraordinary freedoms granted to it, it became a state above states: It had its own court, made the pope the supreme law maker in Christendom and levied a tax of ten percent on its subjects.[76]

The fundamental problem was that, in Gregory's view, the pope was supreme in matters of morality. This meant there really was no supreme morality just a set of guiding principles which the pontiff could suspend at his pleasure. Of course, if the emperor was immoral, the pope could suspend him, and nothing was more immoral than opposing the pope. This secular clerical split remains essentially irreconcilable and comprises one of the enduring conflicts of Western history.[77]

In view of this split, it is hardly surprising that one of the West's most elusive ideals has been that of a perfect union of church and state. If most medieval leaders agreed on the principle, they struggled over who would be master of the combination pope or emperor. Gregory succeeded in humiliating Henry IV in 1077, but this proved to be a costly victory because the use of material means to combat force with force succeeded too well.[78] As classic victims of the neurotic paradox, the popes became increasingly ambitious for secular power and ever more willing to use material means to obtain it. Consequently, papal power reached its zenith under Innocent III in the early thirteenth century.[79] In the battle between popes and emperors, the temporal power of the papacy increased except under popes who tried to be Christian, thus allowing ethics to intrude into political considerations. As this did not happen often, papal power finally freed the Church of lay control, and the popes became answerable only to God, who was not asking many questions.

However, the papacy's triumph was also its tragedy, as it battled the emperors not on behalf of the people but for the sake of its own prestige. After greed, pride, not Christian humility, was the key to medieval character, and it showed itself when the popes claimed the right to judge the morality of everyone according to their own double standard. Everyone else was supposed to be moral; popes were supposed to be successful, and the criteria for papal success were incredibly temporal not spiritual.

Likewise, it was more pride than humility that led to the ultimate in medieval idiocy the Crusades. They proved little more than the limits of moral reform, in that the guiding ethic for the European community as it turned outward toward the world was anything but Christian. The early Crusades were conducted with incredible enthusiasm, but certainly none was infused with the spirit of Christ and only the first (ca. 1100) met with any real success if leaving the streets of Jerusalum ankle deep in blood[80] is a measure of Christian success.

This was the brain child of Pope Urban II, who perceived a holy war against the infidels as an opportunity to unify the Western Europe into one grand destructive enterprise. For generations, the Turks had been deliberately insulting Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem, and about 1075, they had taken the Holy Sepulcher. The Crusaders were to avenge these disgraces while, in addition, private warfare would be ended by Christians who were encouraged to stop fighting each other and fight Muslims instead.[81] Further, the Byzantine

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Church would be set aside to the greater glory of Rome if not God.[82]

The response of the people to the pope's call was overwhelming, and even if the motives for responding were mixed, the reaction suggests how effective an organization the Church had become in the previous five hundred years. At the end of the sixth century, the Western world really was not a civilization in any manner of speaking: It was a chaos of political, economic and social fragments a non system of self seeking individuals devoid of hope and without any functional, common ideal. By the close of the eleventh century, Europe was united by a shared belief which commanded all to cooperate under the cross.[83]

The irony, of course, was that the Crusades were so fundamentally unchristian in spirit. However, in this regard, they were but an expression of an institutionalized Church which was neither intellectually nor morally sound but somehow worked by functionally framing a theology slanted toward maintaining the institution itself rather than the morality of the parishioners.

Fortunately, the Bible condoned violence in statecraft which it condemned in the private affairs of individuals[84]–an issue that Machiavelli later ignored. Certainly, it was something less than Christian, but those insiders who knew did not care, and those believers who would have cared not only did not know but did not want to. With the onset of the Crusades, all the debauchery, scandal and violence of the Age of Christ were forgotten. All the evil, lazy, stupid priests had done their worst, but the mutable message of St. Paul if not Jesus had survived,[85] and the Crusaders sallied forth to kill for Christ.[86] How tragic that the first time Europe discovered a unifying cause, it was such a perversion of a holy ideal. Actually, corrupted Christianity may have provided only an inspirational guise for many, as there were almost as many motives for going as there were Crusaders: Some went out of boredom[87] looking for adventure, others for trade routes and others for plunder.[88]

Still, most who went were devout, desired to spread the faith and responded on impulse to the call with genuine religious enthusiasm and usually without calculating the consequences. In fact, the zeal of these true believers for this dubious adventure was as infectious and blinding as it was sincere. Sounding like role models for our contemporary jihadists, Crusaders felt they practiced the one and only true religion, were fighting a just cause when they slew infidels and increased their chances of getting into heaven by risking their lives in such self righteous homicide.[89] There was a frenzy among those committed to the cause, and reason and caution may have been further blunted by the fear some had of being thought cowards if they exercised reason or restraint. Seldom did anyone consider the inadequacy of his means or whether he should yield up his lands and livelihood. Princes went because they could afford to; paupers because cost was no object. Others sold their property at the lowest possible price to the few who stayed behind to profit from the righteous ardor of the many.[90]

If each went for his own reasons and without regard for his means, when combined into the rather motley crew they did indeed comprise, the Crusaders beg for but almost defy definitive characterization.[91] They were medieval terrorists who conducted ferocious progroms against Jews and ethnic cleansing against any nonChristians.[92] Driven by the same spirit that animated the *conquistadores* some 300 years later in the Americas,[93] they were greedy, savage bigots parading down a path of blood, sweat and tears, but they were also pious, heroic, virtuous, magnanimous pilgrims serving the cause of Christ with honor.[94] In a word, they were "Human".

The identity of the Crusaders was blurred by the assumptions of historians who applied their own perceptual hangups to the objects of their studies. Thus, a French historian saw them as establishing the first French Empire. Arab nationalists saw them as ethnic exploiters. 19th century analysts presented them as imperialists, while 20th century Marxists saw them as agents of economic expansion. However, in their day, they were considered idealists–although the ideal was one of sacred violence and penitential warfare sanctioned by the pope.[95]

Whatever the Crusaders were, they were supported by a Europe which mobilized for their exploits in much the way we today mobilize for war. Swept up in the grand passion of mass groupthink, crusading feudal chiefs ceased to oppress, robbers ceased to steal, and people ceased to complain. On the surface at least, the one somewhat misleading but sacred idea of holy Christianity predominated, and there was little to no room for any other.[96]

As grand as this may have been, there was another side to the story. Since all sins would be forgiven when the Crusaders arrived in Palestine, hundreds of them indulged in unrestrained licentiousness. Debauchery flourished as never before and without shame since service alone would atone for all transgressions. Hence, with salvation assured, reason was abandoned and cries of revelry mingled with the prayers arising from the Crusaders' camps.[97]

Such cries and prayers notwithstanding, the Crusades had three major results. The first was that papal power was enhanced: This was the only major (if cynical) goal that was realized. Second, many European Jews were massacred,[7] robbed and forcibly baptized:

[7] Eliminating Jewish moneylenders was a cheap way of cancelling debts, and when a Jewish community barricaded themselves in a

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There were some especially large scale massacres of Jews in Germany, although York was the site of one of the most appalling of these mass atrocities.[98] Third: There was an increase in literary traffic between East and West. Until the Crusades, contact had been mostly commercial; thereafter, it was cultural as well.[99]

As part of our common heritage of misunderstandings from the past, the term "Crusader" has for some reason survived as a designation of honor and virtue. This is rather incredible, considering that the original crusaders were little more than loosely organized mobs of cutthroats. Seldom in history have such vicious gangs of self opinionated invaders robbed and slaughtered in such righteousness. If there is any lesson to be learned from the crusaders, it must be that the lowest acts of cruelty and violence can be motivated as well as rationalized by the loftiest of ideals.[100] Excesses are usually dangerous to everyone, and nothing goes to excess like religious zeal, since there is no internal check on power employed in a just cause.

If the Crusades were fundamentally sacrilegious, they merely demonstrated that this was an age of both belief and blasphemy. Although Christian (i.e., kind, humane) behavior was probably as common but hard to document then as in any other age or culture,[101] Christian theology developed more to promote and justify the dominance of the feudal Church than to govern medieval conduct. Derived from and applied to the people, Christian ideals were roundly ignored by nearly everyone, and if this went unnoticed, bear in mind the reason we call the Dark Ages dark was precisely because there were no doubters, critics or heretics: Essentially everyone accepted Gregory the Great's principle of blind faith blindly, as his doctrine did not allow even the possibility of questioning dogma.

This anti intellectual tradition was ably championed by St. Bernard, who headed a fervent mystical movement within the Church in the early twelfth century. He believed that an intense subjective experience, not reason, was the way to religious truth. As do all bigots, he knew what that truth was, abhorred curiosity and actively combated heresy by imposing orthodoxy on adventurous philosophers. Consistent with his mysticism, he deplored papal absorption in worldly affairs and disdained temporal power. He felt the pope was and should be a spiritual leader and not get involved with actual, gritty government. He was shocked that the pope defended his domains by military force and could not understand that wars like the Crusades required organization and could not be conducted by religious enthusiasm alone.[102] He and everyone else in Christiandom were even more shocked when his disorganized Crusade (II) failed. What was God doing? How could He have let the Christian effort down? Actually, Bernard's impetus represented a spiritual ultimate the withdrawal not only from both reason and reality.

This withdrawal was typical of medieval theologians, as their assumed task was not to adapt the teachings of Christ to the world but to maintain established Pauline orthodoxy. Whereas St. Bernard's mystical approach emphasized inspiration over contemplation, it was the Scholastics' methodical logic and faith in reason which made a lasting contribution to the development of Western thought primarily by the platonically clever ways they created support for conventional conclusions. Further, it was their determined commitment to find orthodox truth that demonstrated the value of doubt and heresy.[103]

Actually, the development of critical reasoning in theology was necessary in Christianity because Jesus wrote nothing down. Paul began the process of deductive reasoning because he knew knowledge of Christ's word was inherently imperfect.[104] In the third century, when Clement of Alexandria opined that doctrines were based not just on faith but by reason as well,[105] reason was used to bring an increasingly accurate understanding of God's will to light. In the ninth century, John Scotus Erigena proclaimed "True religion is pure philosophy".[106] For Anselm of Canterbury circa 1078, belief was primary, leading, via reason, to understanding.[107] Intrinsically coupled to reason was the idea of progressive[8] improvement in understanding both Father and Son,[108] and that both are understandable:[109] Philosophy and revelation were compatible with each other[110] and theology.

Subsequently, St. Bernard's archenemy, Peter Abelard (1100), accepted the Bible as infallible but also believed questioning led to truth. Thus, he did not try to resolve theological conflicts rationally so much as explain them away as being due to the changing meanings of words.[111] It was outrageous enough that he raised questions implying limits on God's abilities, but, worse yet, he did not answer the questions he raised but *left them for the people to decide for themselves*.[112] Despite Bernard's denunciation of his works as "Stupidology", theoreticians after him took Aristotelean rationalism to excess, with Christian theology to take on an airy life in the halls of the hairsplitting scholastic philosophers the creators of an ideology functionally

castle tower, they were beset by rioters and the sheriff's men, who were supposed to protect them. In fear of the pending outcome, the men killed their families and then themselves. (Lacey. pp. 9495.) Viva Masada!

[8] It is precisely this notion of progress that is absent from Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism because devotees thereof could not believe that their sages and priests were not perfect in their sacred pronouncements. (Watson. 2011. p. 447.) *Progress is essentially a Christian idea* and it was made possible by substituting empirical data for faith as the starting point for reason leading to understanding and progress.

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disowned by the evolving Church which produced and promoted it.

As members of a school of philosophy, the Scholastics were clearly committed more to theological orthodoxy than moral reform, with most contributors retracting anything considered heretical. This was not necessarily an indication of intellectual cowardice but more a matter of acquiescing to the decisions of ranking authorities, much as our modern judges do when yielding to higher courts.[113] In matters in which dogma did not prohibit speculation, there could be vigorous debate and even occasional heresy, but most clerics were definitely conservative politically and did not typically challenge the power structure either inside or outside the Church.[114]

Basically, the Scholastics represented a compensatory reaction of theologians to the power struggles of the Church. They were very intelligent men who could not cope with the reality of the Church within its own constraining framework so they hid from the Orthodoxy might as well have been presented and defended by so many frogs croaking mindlessly on so many holy lily pads.[118]

During the twelfth century, Western culture was opening up as Christian scholars, who had eschewed this world for 1,000 years, began to reengage with it.[119] This was due partially to the contact with the East brought about by the Crusades and partially due to the translation of Greek books which gradually became available to Western scholars in ever increasing numbers: specifically, there was a shift in interest from the ideals of Plato to the reality of Aristotle.[120] This shift was opposed by some who felt humans had no business trying to understand "the composition of the globe, the nature of the elements, the location of the stars,[9] the nature of animals, the violence of the wind, the life processes of plants and of roots".[121] These were countered by Aristotelean Scholastics like William of Conches, who noted (ca. 1130), "Ignorant themselves of the forces of nature and wanting company in their ignorance, they don't want people to look into anything. They want us to believe like peasants and not ask the world in quibbling debates about formality and trivia. None of these debates dealt with matters with which the Church was involved for example, they did not discuss the immorality of the Crusades and call for their abolition. Generally, the Scholastic philosophers acted, to the long term detriment of the Church, with self serving, short term political astuteness and couched their rationalizations and justifications for the status morbus in biblical language.

Thus, the Scholastics conducted discussions which were not only narrowly orthodox but, worse yet, functionally irrelevant. Never mind that the Christian, immortal soul was prefigured by Plato: As the ultimate Stoic, Jesus buried Epicureans, who outageously alleged the pleasure seeking soul is mortal, as did Aristotle and Augustine.[115] For the sake of sanctity, Christians renounced their entire pagan heritage,[116] and for centuries, Greek philosophy was banned because the Church feared it could lead people to seek concrete, logical truths in a world based on faith.[117] reason behind things....But we say the reason behind *everything* (sic) should be sought out."[122]

The Scholastics also opened up and debated broad philosophical issues but only in ways that left them meaningless. While they considered Aristotle rather than Plato the supreme lay authority, they took the worst of both: They carried on Aristotle's love of syllogisms, devoted themselves to silly exercises in logic and retained Plato's defects of idealizing abstractions and coining arguments leading to preestablished conclusions. As is so often the case, their strength was also their weakness in that their commitment to thought made them indifferent to facts, science and reality. Hence, they routinely debated matters which only observation could determine and became enraptured with verbal distinctions and pointless subtleties.[123]

For example, in Summa Theologiae, St. Thomas Aquinas's most extensive work, he dealt at length with the weighty issue of the possibility of several angles being in the same place at the same time. This has since been commonly misrepresented as the question of how many angles can dance on the head of a pin, but the later humanist critics were justified in pointing out that the Scholastics, like the theologians at the time of Rome's demise, absorbed themselves with pedantic trivia while ignoring the real major issues of the time.

This propensity was capped in the thirteenth century, when Aquinas succeeded to a degree, in a modernesque mode, in substituting rational principles for appeals to Biblical authority[124] that is, when and where logic proved a theological point, it trumped recourse to the Bible.[125] His great work Summa contra Gentiles convincingly established the truth of Christianity in the minds of any reader who already believed it. However, he failed in his purpose to convert through reason, which could be used by all, those (i.e., Moslems

[9] As odd as it now seems astrology–astronomy applied to human affairs was the means for many contemporary fields of endeavor to enter the Western conscience. Astronomy, geography, geometry, mathematics, medicine and physics all made their triumphant returns to European culture by way of this flaky nonscience: (White, L. p. 298.) e.g. when mercury is conjoined with Jupiter, men will seek knowledge, the sciences and writing–Jupiter being the planet of understanding and intelligence. However, when Jupiter is joined with Mars, wise men will be scorned, and when it is joined with the sun, science and knowledge will be obscured. (Rangel.) From this, we conclude that Jupiter hangs more with Mars and the sun than with Mercury. Astrology eventually fell into disfavor because it limited human and divine influence on affairs. (Doubleday. p. 57.) Now, deism is on the wane because it limits human influence. Sorry, God.(;(

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and Jews) who did not accept the Bible itself as proof of the validity of the Christian faith. What he unwittingly succeeded in doing was demonstrating the limitations of reason since some Christian doctrines (like the existence of God and the immortality of the soul) can be proved to someone who accepts Aristotelian definitions and logic while, as he admits, in Part IV, other cardinal dogmas of Christianity (like the Trinity and the Incarnation) cannot be proved[10] but must be accepted on faith alone.[126]

Nevertheless, even this qualified triumph of Aquinas to bridge the Bible and Aristotle (at the expense of Plato)[127] by converting him to Christianity was too complete. Thought never had been really free, but after his works became dogma, theologians had to limit themselves to nitpicking his inconsistencies. He was accepted as a success because he provided the Church with what it needed and wanted a philosophy which seemed to justify its existence, and his schema has dominated the Church ever since.

Although Aquinas had actually disproved reliance on logic, his fellow Scholastics did not read him that way, preferring to think that reality had failed to live up to the standards of reason. As they drifted into splendid isolation, they became surprisingly harsh in their judgments, since they were removed from and indifferent to the concrete tangibles of life. Intoxicated by logic, verbiage and abstraction, they scorned the real world and withdrew into a dehumanized, disembodied academia whose removed spirit still pervades Church policy as well as the uninvolved attitudes of our contemporary learned institutions at their pointless worst. The arts were slighted, science feared, imagination regarded as heretical and the mind honed to conformity at the expense of informed creativity.[128]

Worse yet, such idiocy was not merely suggestive. Having come to the belated realization that Plato and Aristotle were, for some reason, not Christians, in 1277, the Church forbade anyone from saying–along with 216 other things: 1.) there is no higher life than philosophical life; 2.) theological discussion are based on fables; and 3.) Christian Revelation is an obstacle to learning,[129] which it is. In other words, do not presume to tell the truth.

In the following centuries, the ensuing confrontation between belief and knowledge could not force the Church to change its mental stance. It stood on dogma, and as it became swamped by the rising tide of new knowledge it refused to recognize, it had to yield its place of preeminence as the West's ultimate intellectual authority to science. Although the failure of theologians to adapt to evolving conditions and face up to the complexities of life may have made their work simpler, the endless conflict between faith and fact could not be contained within monastic halls. Finally, it moved beyond Church control into the open air of the secular world, and the complex of philosophy, science and religion which Aquinas had constructed broke apart in demoralizing confusion. It was in that shattered environment that the modern mind began its continuing search for a plausible consistency amongst the discrepant ways we think, know, believe and behave.[130]

Actually, this search for a comprehensible reality began within the medieval Church as some thinkers transcended their theological training and achieved a measure of intellectual ability which carried them beyond the range of their age. The Franciscan Order was especially "Blessed" with two such individuals in Roger Bacon and William of Occam. As a Franciscan philosopher, Bacon (1214-1294) was a visionary[131] a la Leonardo. He had a passion for mathematics and science, which in his time was an odd mixture of alchemy[132] and magic, and is credited with inventing spectacles.[133] Unlike most philosophers of his time, he valued experiment highly and considered logic rather useless. In his Opus Majus, he listed four causes of ignorance, which were: 1.) false authority which did not include the Church since the book was written for the pope; 2.) custom; 3.) uninformed opinion meaning all but his own; and 4.) hiding one's ignorance behind a display of apparent wisdom which he considered the worst of the four. He made a career of attacking clerical ignorance and for some reason was never popular among the clergy. In 1278, his books were condemned, and he was imprisoned until shortly before his death.[134]

Early in the fourteenth century, William of Occam set rational theology back on its ear by showing that reason could not prove the truth of dogma. When engaged in disputes, he frequently resorted to the precept *"Pluarlitas no est ponenda sine necessitat"*, meaning keep it simple or, not to be vulgar: Cut out the...ah....extra stuff. In fact, he resorted to it so often that he became ascribed to him as his "Razor".[135] The result was that theology was finally recognized as sterile and dogma restored to the realm of pure faith. The problem with theology had been that its goal was to demonstrate known truths. This basic problem remained in philosophy, but the enthusiasm and curiosity of the Scholastics for theology staled, and they settled down to choosing horns on dilemmas.[136]

In the long run, the commitment of the Western mind to reason has been less than a complete success. Part of the explanation is that logic omits feelings and spiritual intangibles that makes life human. This was already apparent in the detachment of the Scholastics in the thirteenth century, but they persisted in their commitment to reason because it was seen as a way to

[10] His proof of the existence of the soul anticipates Leibnitz's odd use of logic to make a desired if dubious case. To wit, all dogs bark, and there must be something in us capable of comprehending such universal statements: That universal statement comprehending thing is the soul. (Hodgkinson and Bergh. p. 232.)

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appeal to those, like Muslims and Jews, who believed in other creeds. In this regard, the effort to render Christianity reasonable must be acknowledged as a failure, since very few were converted to the cause by logical argument[11] the efforts of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Dominic notwithstanding.[137]

In a more immediate sense, the synthesis St. Thomas achieved,[138] which seemed so complete and final, was an even greater failure. It disintegrated in the face of changing conditions in a world Church leaders attempted to rule but could not understand. In the secular domain, democracy, nationalism and commercialism were on the rise as was immorality within the Church.[139] These changes presented challenges to which the Church could not respond effectively because the papal hierarchy could not comprehend them within its irrelevant, theologically correct, Christian schema.

In terms of general political conditions, the seeds of democracy were present, and the medieval Church itself was actually quite egalitarian in practice (offering high careers to the lowest of men if talented[140]) as well as democratic in practice (holding elections to clerical offices) and theory (i.e., theology). Generally, the peasants did have some rights, but these made them equal only to each other, and as in all ages, the only true equality came with death. While waiting to be equalized, few were actually stupid enough to take Church pronouncements on human rights seriously, but one of these was John Ball. In the fourteenth century, he audaciously proclaimed that "At the beginning we were all created equal; it is the tyranny of perverse men which has caused slavery to arise, in spite of God's law". He was properly drawn and quartered, but authorities still have not killed his dream of equality[141] before the law.

A step toward English rights was taken with the creation of a document which listed grievances which the king promised to “Abolish all the evil customs by which the kingdom of England has been unjustly oppressed”. It was the great great grandfather of the Declaration of Independence, but it was not the Magna Charta: It was the Coronation Charter of Henry I granted in 1100. It set the dubious precedent of being a set of campaign promises which were ignored once the grantor gained the power to effect them. Further, the barons who pushed the Magna Carta on King John in 1215, set another precedent by taking their revolutionary step forward by looking backward toward restoring a fantasized golden age free of political corruption rather than the sordid historic past as it actually was.[142]

Meanwhile, in France, England and Spain, strong monarchies arose and served as focal points for emerging nationalist sentiments in these regions.[12] As spokesmen for all those who spoke their respective tongues, the kings were strong enough to fight the pope in their own national interests. In their kingdoms, they suppressed anarchy and allied themselves against the aristocracy and with the growing merchant class.[143]

In general, the feudal aristocracy had been ignorant, barbaric and stupid. In fact, the aristocracy was so bad that it made the Church look cognizant, civil and wise. However, the new commercial class was more knowledgeable in mundane affairs than the clergy, more pragmatic than the nobles and more dynamic than both. As such, the business class played a decisive role not only in breaking Europe out of the Dark Ages but later in breaking down medieval conditions altogether. This it did directly through mercantile endeavor as well as indirectly by serving as a focus for support not only of nationalistic royalty but of the lower classes, who saw the emerging business class as champions of civil liberties and economic opportunity[144] for all.

For its part, the Church was characteristically obtuse with respect to the rising commercial class. In fact, the flat approach of the Scholastics to real life in general was indicated by their attitude toward economics. Aquinas, *i.a.,* worked out a "Just price"[145] for goods rather than having the seller fix the price or charge whatever the market would bear. Divinely impractical "Christian merchants" were to charge just enough to cover costs of their labor, and usury was roundly condemned.[146]

However, if the Scholastics were naive enough to think that business morality could be set by holy pronouncement, they were not stupid enough to believe that public welfare would be enhanced by businessmen in the pursuit of profit. The medieval mind had many blind spots, but it recognized corrupting greed for what it was and called it by its proper name rather than "Enterprise" or "Economy".[147]

What the medieval mind could not recognize was the subconscious desecration of its own ideals. The Virgin, who had conceived without recourse to the joy of sin, now was unwittingly seduced. She was deflowered by the traveling salesman as the new business class remade feudal society into a money economy. The consummation was rather tranquil and largely without self conscious class conflict so there was no bleeding to belie the change of condition. As the new class rose to power, it left medieval myths intact, so everyone could

[11] Looking farther afield and 300 years earlier, the most persuasive theological argument used to convert Icelanders was to present them with the option of conversion or a very Christian beheading. (Haywood. p. 227.) At the same time, Iceland became northern Europe’s first democracy, (Bernowski. p. 411.) so something significant was going on.

[12] The trend toward secular government was captured, in 1337-1338, in the Sienna palace by Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s fresco in which he depicted the effects of good and bad government on the republic–bountiful harvests and humming commerce on the one hand; devastation and discord on the other. (C. Maier. p. 95.)

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claim belief in the sanctity of familiar, sacred Church fictions,[148] however irrelevant they were becoming.

Philosophically, the Virgin could remain pure and eternally dedicated to the established, sham society because the Church was protected in error by ignorance. Devils and witches were invented and feared, but the pious never questioned the truth of the Scriptures upon which everything was theoretically based.[149] To the extent that reason was employed, it was used, often brilliantly, not for self correction but to explain away basic errors or inconsistencies in theology.

While reason was being bent to provide democrats, nationalists and capitalists with a theological basis for civil, political and business ethics, the papacy was losing both the secular power and moral prestige it had earned and enjoyed up to the end of the thirteenth century.[150] Officially, the decline began with Innocent III (1198-1216),who was a firm believer in the papacy if not Christ. He had the most able mind of his age but questionable scruples and was a trend setter in being the first great pope without a trace of sanctity.[151] Less a priest than a monarch, he called for Church reforms[152] while his commitment to power politics actually set the tone for further papal misconduct and induced the fall of the Christian Empire.

In fact, the first signs of decline were evident in the nature of the moral reforms called for by the pope: For example, in the sacred cause of orthodoxy, the Church was committed to the conversion or destruction of heretics. Thus, St. Dominic (1170-1221) and some misplaced Crusaders were dispatched to southern France by Innocent to bring into the fold the Albigenses a wayward sect whose members rejected some Church doctrines: specifically, they entertained a dualist belief that Satan had more powers than acknowledged by the Church.[153] Worse yet, they criticized clerical corruption, strayed into righteousness[13] and lived in conspicuous virtue and purity in a violent, undisciplined and vicious age. Such rectitude had to be eliminated, so Dominic and the Crusaders than the sordid than the sordid: Those whom he could not convert they slew.[154]

At best, St. Dominic's efforts indicated a naive faith in reason as well as an awareness on the part of the pope that force was not the answer to the problems Christianity posed for the world and vice versa. However, along with the rising tide of theological discussions of and Scholastic debates about airy theoretical issues, the development of the Dominican Order showed the Church committed ever more deeply to organized dogma. This was a turning point, and the Church took turned back toward a hopeless conflict with the intellectual advance and moral integrity of Western Man.[155]

Worse yet, this dogma was not even the Church's version of Christ's message but a theological rationalization for its own existence. In framing it, theologians had always been restrained by the verbiage of the creed while the behavior of the popes belied their fundamental faith in power. Confronted with the opportunity to be Christian or reign and rule, the hierarchy of the Church compromised its moral spirit for the sake of worldly sovereignty. Like Rome before it, *the Church became corrupted from the top down*, and the spirit of Christ was smothered, sought refuge outside Catholicism or even "Heretically" opposed it.

The resulting decline of the Church was thus induced partly by the worldly success of Innocent and his successors and partly by their intolerance toward questions and dissent. Church leaders were intolerant not because they were sure of their faith and themselves but because they were not. They had lost faith in the power of truth because their own self serving version was faltering.[156] By the thirteenth century, they already were haunted by gnawing doubts about their pretensions and were anxious about the future of the Church. Personifying cognitive dissonance, they knew they could not succeed in state affairs by adhering to and applying the code of ethics they preached to individuals,[14] nor could they give up on their dysfunctional theological schema. What they could do and did with a vengeance was establish a Papal Inquisition to persecute heretics as well as anyone (like the Albigenses) who lived up to Christian standards or, what's worse, suggested that they themselves should do so.

Certainly under its auspices, many of the victims persecuted as heretics were not atheists or unbelievers but simple, pious souls who took Christianity seriously and literally and, worst of all, practiced it. Such believers in Christ became mortal, moral and mental enemies of the iconoclastic Church, which itself had become heretical.[157]

One of the more disturbing features of the Inquisition was that it was not conducted by a bunch of nutty fanatics but by somber, sober leaders in the establishment. They were simply determined to stay established, and they did for more than three hundred years, but the institution they headed ultimately paid for their

[13] Their way to righteousness was paved by their hatred of the material world in general and the human body in particular. (Cahill. 2006. p. 89.) Generally during this period, crusaders were dispatched to various spots in Europe to grab land and settle old scores among strong armed leaders.(Haywood. pp. 325-326.)

[14] A similar but milder attitude pervades the global warming community today as demonstrated by the tendency to respond to climate skeptics with personal attacks rather than reasoned arguments based on facts. (Freitas.) In this context, a word is in order. Faith is a system of belief based on no, partial, or selected facts. The intellectual battle in Western civilization over the past 1,000 years has been to increase the proportion of facts in the mix. On the other hand, faith provides the moral standard for judging conduct. On the third hand, logic can be used by anyone, starting with faith or fact, to promote his/her particular cause.

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lished, and they did for more than three hundred years, but the institution they headed ultimately paid for their n-dox success. Where their police methods were most effective, the Church became ever more powerful, worldly and corrupt. Success was defined as uniform belief, which was inimical to the moral, spiritual and intellectual health of everyone the Inquisitors included.[158]

It would have been sad enough if this intolerance had been due to a sincere commitment to Christ, but the overwhelming compulsion of the authorities was to make everything fit the letter of Church dogma rather than the spirit of Christ's teachings. Further, their manner of enforcing conformity was actually contemptuous of Jesus, who, as a man of proun d peace, never ordered anyone killed or forced his religion on anyone.[159] The methods of suppression were indeed so horrendous that in its paranoid attempt to hang on to worldly rule, the Church caused more human suffering than any other organization or institution until modern technology became available to twentieth century fanatics. People were tortured and murdered with a cynicism that insults the mental dignity of all but the most righteous bigot[15]. Eventually, the shameful devotion to worldly power combined with the new business spirit of the age, and in a blatant commitment to material gain, the Church commercialized religion to the point that, with the sale (i.e., granting for a price) of indulgences, it sold its soul.[160]

This eventuality was made all the more likely because, during the medieval era, theological dogmatism prevented Church leaders from comprehending what they were doing. Worse yet, dogmatism was not limited to theological matters since the mind-guards of Churchianity[161] feared any knowledge and distrusted any thinking they could not channel to acceptable (i.e., self-confirming) conclusions. Rather than leading the way, *the Catholic hierarchy came to contest and combat* every advance in thought and *almost every attempt to apply Christian principles to life*. They felt obligated to exercise totalitarian control over all aspects of life and thereby alienated the intellectual consci-ence of Western man.

Despite Augustine's admonition that the Church guard against interpretations of the Bible that opposed science thus exposing the Word of God and the best efforts of Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1250), the inventor of experimentation[162] to ridicule[163] science and facts were both ignored, disdained or condemned as unbiblical. All mental activity was repressed except the pointless exercises in logic by the Scholastics. Otherwise, Church officials could not leave to reason only things that were reasonable: Hence, the struggle over the position of the earth in the universe became a religious controversy although it was a matter that could be settled not by logic but by observation and, further, really was not any business of the Church's at all[164] other than it happened threatened to undercut theism. The apparent, presumed movement of the heavens was one of the most common observations used as evidence that God exists[165] so saying that such apparent motion was an illusion was extemely traumatic to the devout,[166] and the Church's position on such matters was disarmingly simple: In a conflict between the bible and observation, scripture prevailed over experience.[167]

Actually, the prevailing fantasy in Rome was that of a universal rule of righteous peace on earth, and, although the popes had betrayed their own chance to lead an effective world government of spiritual affairs,[16] they failed to recognize that like Rome the Church was being corrupted by its involvement with the world it was busily reshaping.[168] Rather, they continued to espouse Christian ethics while the papacy became just another worldly, power-hungry office.

In its doomed efforts to establish a Kingdom of the Clergy on earth, the Church was increasingly committed to maintaining dogma while pursuing power politics. Particularly at the top, the popes and their advisors were committed to winning immediate political ends and dropped all but their verbal commitment to ethical considerations and long term views of a better i.e., more Christian world. Victory for the papacy over the emperors became an end in itself, and as the pope presumably personified and certainly defined righteous rule, power gained for the Church was automatically construed as furthering the idea of universal peace. Even when doubts were entertained about the ethics of Church policy, there was no questioning of its righteousness: Whatever it was, it was correct. The only ideological discord permitted raged over petty disputes of doctrine which were usually settled by arbitrary authority shaped according to the powers within the Church. There was no effective self-criticism or reexamination of basic ideals and little likelihood that Christian values might actually influence or infringe upon basic papal policy.[169]

Nor would there be internal reform through efforts of those like St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), who personified sincerity[17] overcome by institutionalism. Something of a hippie styled weirdo,[170] he renounced a genteel life and committed himself to imitating Christ, serving the sick and wretched and particularly the lepers.[171] Joined by a great number of disciples,

[15] This smacks of the enhanced interrogation techniques of the 21st century CIA and their fervent ilk.

[16] In fact, this remains a universal ideal of secular minds to this day.

[17] Francis could forgive anything but the pride of the Scholastics because, in his Christian simplicity, he cared naught for reason, knowledge or the classics. How ironic it is that although St. Francis disliked learning, the greatest minds of the following period were those of above mentioned Franciscans Roger Bacon and William of Occam.

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of the Church that these early Franciscans were suspected of heresy because of their greatest virtue integrity. Not only did they take a vow to poverty, but they took it seriously and, worse yet, practiced it.[172] Such cognitive consistency was a dangerous precedent but miraculously, the Church was rescued from righteous reform and theology from good intentions.

The very success and popularity of the order led to its expansion. This brought upon Francis increased administrative demands which his religious mysticism could not meet, so he resigned.[173] Until his death, he remained committed to poverty as so many are, but even before then the institution he created had already taken on a life of its own in direct contradiction to the principles upon which it had been founded. His successor, Brother Elias, allowed complete abandonment of poverty and wallowed in luxury, and St. Francis was hardly dead before his order was holding property and building a great church and monastery in his name at Assisi. During this period, the Franciscans served chiefly as recruiting sergeants in selected wars of the time and conducted inquisitions in several countries. Thus, the net effect of St. Francis on the internal organization of the Church was the creation of yet another order corrupted by wealth, committed to the worldly establishment and engaged in persecuting all who strayed into morality or, worse yet, thought for themselves.[174]

By way of contrast, a group known as the Spiritualists remained loyal to the spirit of Francis and argued and preached that Christ and his apostles possessed no property. This proposition proved too much for the Church and was pronounced false by Pope John XXII in 1323. Thereafter, those Spiritualists who preached the word of St. Francis were righteously scourged, imprisoned and burned at the stake as heretics.[175]

This reaction of the Church was typical of the institution to what were perceived as troubles brewing within it. St. Francis provided a simple, absolutely impossible ideal in an age of corruption.[176] unfortunately for the Church, such attempts to purify it from within were treated as threats to the establishment and were suppressed and/or vitiated to standards acceptable to the mighty. The dogma of the Church rather than the spirit of Christ reigned supreme.

Thus, the Church did its worst to bring itself into ill repute by becoming lost in dogma while at the same time it was becoming thoroughly worldly. For example, the papacy was coming to play the role of an earlier day Internal Revenue Service. As such, it taxed the pocketbooks and patience of its parishioners as well as the consciences of its priests. On one hand, it drew to itself revenues which the emerging nations of Europe would preferred to have kept at home. On the other, it gave ever less for the support it received because the popes were losing the moral authority that had once given them power. To wit, in the thirteenth century, St. Francis had been able to work with Innocent III, but by the next century, earnest clerics found themselves in conflict with the popes precisely because they were earnest about their all defining religion.[177]

Ironically for the Church, the political power the popes had worked so hard to attain did not endure long beyond the loss of the moral authority which had been sacrificed to attain it. The first indication of this decline came when Pope Boniface VIII was beaten up and arrested by the French king in 1303. It is significant that this act was committed with the approval of the vast majority of the French people and accepted by the other states, suggesting the papacy had come to be generally regarded as a nemesis by both the people and states of Europe.[178]

The fact that the power of the immoral papacy had indeed declined was also indicated by the life and fate of John Wycliffe (1320-1384). He was driven to heresy late in life by the strength of his moral feelings, his sympathy for the poor and his contempt for the rich, worldly clergy. He taught it was unrighteous of the clergy to hold property and that people should think for themselves specifically that anyone could interpret the Bible. Worse yet, he maintained only God and Jesus knew who was going to Heaven, so he advocated obedience directly to Christ rather than the pope,[179] who was not to be trusted.[180] This did not endear him to the Church, which was righteously outraged, but the English government was delighted, since the pope drew huge tributes from England. The indication that papal power had declined was that Wycliffe did not suffer more than he did for his opinions: He was ordered to be silent but was not formally condemned when he died,[181] although, by papal order in1428, his body was exhumed and burned.[182]

Even when weighed with the good the clergy did for devout individuals in need of hope and consolation, the overall story of the Church in the Middle Ages must be regarded as a tragedy. It failed to achieve a noble, splendid, ideal world unified in the spirit of Christian peace, and it failed as a temporal political power. In its twofold failure, it was encumbered by a complex, dogmatic, irrelevant theology which itself somehow ignored idealized moral issues while casting the activities of the clergy in a bad light. The basic problem was that there was too much theology and not enough religion, so ethics were sacrificed for expediency while ideology remained a stumbling block to the education of Church leaders. In fact, Christian theology failed as a moral guide because it prevented the clergy from attaining the breadth of knowledge needed for success in the worldly tasks the Church had assumed.

There was little breadth and less learning mostly because the range of thought was limited by the

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"Christian" schema. Understandably, leaders seemed obsessed with rationalizing their actions in terms of a divine ideology geared toward getting the guilty into heaven. Although popes and Emperors ruled high and mighty, they were usually too preoccupied with petty political squabbles to deal with underlying socio/economic problems.

This underscores the basic challenge for those who lived during the Middle Ages to remain unconscious of the cogdis, contradictions in medieval life.[183] The Church set heavenly standards but played by very human rules, so if Church officials were surprised when the Reformation occurred, so are we that it was so long in coming.

Eventually, reform had to come because the Middle Ages were a lost cause. As hollow monuments to emptiness, the medieval cathedrals which dot the European landscape are forlorn reminders of the earthy life that streamed around them despite what was preached in them. Just as Church officials were drawn into the real world so were the church buildings as both favored trysting places for lovers and hunting grounds for prostitutes. Only Church ideologues remained aloof from reality as the logical, verbal games they played with themselves cast a spell over the minds if not the morals of the age. In fact, the truly great miracle of the age was that Catholic ideology was so effective in blocking thought and criticism but so ineffective in shaping behavior and controlling conduct. Finally, however, in spite of the worst efforts of medieval theologians and because of the immoral reforms of the popes, the Western mind became restless, striving, experimental and eager for learning.[184]

As the Roman Empire decayed, the medieval Church proved that power abhors a vacuum. As the Church's secular role expanded, it found itself encumbered by its theological if not spiritual commitment to Christ. As the Middle Ages developed, the Church took both power and theology to extremes the one to the point of corruption and the other to the point of pointlessness. In fact, if theology had any function beyond itself, it was to keep the clergy oblivious to clerical corruption. In thus taking iniquity and otherwise senseless theology to extremes, the Church was but typically medieval in that this was a period of boundless love for simple, pure commitments to perfect ideals and sacred causes betrayed.[185] Bottom line, there was something absurd about exalting divine humiliation. Jesus was conceived in adultery, his worldly father was an average Joe, he could not make it as a carpenter, and both his poverty and death made an absolute mockery of his alleged, divine status.[186]

Actually, the medieval mind accepted such "Figments of diseased imagination"[187] because they were no more absurd than their pagan counterparts, and because it was so simple. Even today, it is occasionally resurrected and appears in some stunted mind committed totally to a single, absolutely pure, just cause. Whether the commitment is to a religion or a secular doctrine, any mentality which keeps itself deliberately flat, unidimensional and uninformed will eventually malfunction in a round world and complex, interactive universe. However, if we have learned anything from the world of ideas in the last 1,000 years, it is that we can reduce the discrepancy between theory and practice in human behavior by introducing cultural checks which help us learn about what we are really doing and our effects on the world and each other. Although uncertain and confused, the modern Western mind began by burying theology and secularizing ideology. Like a bewildered phoenix molded from the ashes of pious heretics, Western Civilization soared into the heady, beckoning firmament of the Renaissance.

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