Chapter Ten

EMERGING EUROPE – THE AGE OF FAITH

In the mythology of the European Union, the 'European project' began with Charlemagne (Karl der Grosse in German; Charles the Great in English). Although there was no concept of 'continents' then, and so of Europe as a continent, the idea is convincing enough. However, Christian people in his time thought of themselves as simply part of the worldwide Christian community – just as Muslims today see themselves as part of the trans-national Islamic community, the *Umma* (or *Ummah*). Charlemagne's *Christendom* had much in common with the *Umma*, where no divide was recognised between the sacred and the secular.

His vision of what he wanted to achieve was greatly influenced by his understanding of Augustine's concept 'the City of God'. Unfortunately, what Augustine's meant by this bore little resemblance to what Charlemagne thought he'd meant. What he – or those who advised him – had imported into the term was Augustine's earlier, triumphalist Christendom thought, not the new and defining idea to be found in the actual book, *City of God*. Inevitably, then, what Charlemagne set about constructing was a renewed Christendom.

When set against truly Christian principles, the Holy Roman Empire – Christendom renewed – can only be reckoned thoroughly unsatisfactory. Its context, however, must be understood. This is how R.H.C. Davis describes it:

> The first period of the Middle Ages, from the fourth century to the ninth, was a time of despair – the 'Dark Ages' – which witnessed the disintegration of the Mediterranean world and the collapse of its political, cultural and economic unity. But even more important than the actual destruction was the fact that people realised that they were

> living in an age of decline. It was what made St Augustine and Gregory the Great think that the end of the world was at hand. It was what gave the sense of urgency to the work of Cassiodorus and Alcuin, striving to salvage the culture of the ancient world before it was too late. It was the great motive-force behind the great political developments of the period.[1]

It wouldn't be too misleading to compare Europe at that time with the post-Saddam Hussein period in Iraq – instability, insecurity, and extensive chaos.

Sometimes the most difficult aspect of history is to get the feel of how people of the time one's interested in actually thought and felt. This cameo from Norman Davies's *Europe: A History* gives a clue as to how things could be in this period:

> By all the omens, 810 was going to be Charlemagne's worst year. There were two eclipses of the sun and two of the moon, all observable in Frankland. And sure enough, the Emperor's pet elephant, a gift from the caliph, died; there was a widespread outbreak of cattle-plague; and the Duke of Benevenuto rebelled.
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> All this, and more, was faithfully recorded by Agobard, Bishop of Lyons (c.779-840). What is more, Agobard found that the common people were drawing superstitious conclusions. They believed that their cattle were dying from a poisonous dust spread by the Duke of Benevenuto's spies. They also believed that Frankland was being invaded by 'cloud-borne ships' navigated by 'aerial sailors'. The invaders were said to be beating down the harvest of the Franks with hailstones launched from the sky, before carrying it off to the far-away land of 'Magonia'. Agobard was not easily swayed by such stories which, after investigation, he duly refuted. Yet he did appear to believe that the Catholic Church was being invaded by Jews. When his collected works were discovered in 1605, it turned out that he had devoted no fewer than five treatises to the Jewish peril.
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> Agobard's most remarkable departure, however, was to demand the establishment of a universal Christian law for a universal Christian commonwealth. 'If God has suffered so that all be reconciled in his Body,' he wrote, 'is not the incredible diversity of laws … in opposition to this divine work of unity?' Agobard was the first European centralist.[2]

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[1] *A History of Medieval Europe*; 1970; London; Longman; ISBN 0 582 48208 9; p203.
[2] p304

The empire Charlemagne created had depended too much on his personal leadership, his military skills, and his hands-on management style to survive intact. Even so, he'd brought to launching-point the idea that would become Europe – its DNA living on after him – and, when he bequeathed to each of his three sons a part of his empire, he gave a 'shape' to the future history of Europe, as well as to its geography. Eventually, the western part was destined to become France, the eastern part Germany, and the central strip between them (which ran from northern Holland – Frisia – down to northern Italy) a battleground that the two of them contested. The new structures had to be made workable, and one means employed was what we know as 'feudalism'.

A developing social order

FEUDALISM As a means of social and political organisation this is more important to understand than might at first appear, because of the way its character determined the shape of church life and Christian discipleship in the emerging Europe. For kings, feudalism provided a viable means of exercising the power they believed they'd been given. For the multitude of 'nobodies' across Western Europe, it provided a way of surviving, even a measure of security, in what could be a potentially-desperate situation. It's in such a light that the feudal system is appropriately judged.

The Roman Empire had been centrally controlled. Feudalism was designed for a later, but much more primitive, situation, where central control was impossible and the money economy had long since collapsed. To the cynic, its basic logic might seem at best that of the 'protection racket': if you work at least part of the time for me (for free), I'll protect you and allow you the means to live. The guarantee here was a pledge of lifelong loyalty – in theory, in both directions. So (greatly simplifying) the king pledged to protect his lords, and they pledged to supply men and equipment for his army. The lord pledged to protect his tenants, and they supplied him with what he needed: agricultural produce, military service

(to allow him to fulfil his commitments), and so on. It was a thoroughly aristocratic system, very top-down, and highly exploitative. At the bottom of the pile people were either slaves (serfs) or virtual slaves. Better than precarious existence in the midst of chaos, this was a political-social model with the potential to develop into civilised society – if slowly. And, though it might be buried under the harsh realities of a life, implicit here was some sort of social contract.

With Frankish rulers, in practice, self-interest and power tended to override the formal rule of law. To be a vassal (very junior partner) in the feudal system could offer some sort of protection: 'The contract of vassalage was a sort of insurance against oppression. While the king's subjects owed him service and obedience and received nothing in return, the vassal bound himself to serve and obey his lord in return for protection and maintenance.'[3]

Actually there was a rather higher view of the theory behind feudal Christendom. The following, from Aelfric, Benedictine Abbot of Evesham in central England, around AD 1000, emphasises its teamwork aspect and underplays its capacity for exploitation – and looks out at life from the perspective of the privileged:

> It is well known that in this world there are three orders, set in unity: those who work, those who pray and those who fight. Those who work labour for our living. Those who pray plead for our peace with God. Those who fight battle to protect our towns and defend our land against an invading army. Now the farmer works to provide our food, and the worldly warrior must fight against our enemies, and the servant of God must always pray for us and fight spiritually against invisible foes.

KINGSHIP In this system, who was to be king? If this isn't a question that interests us much today, it was one of the utmost importance until the arrival of democracy. When the Germanic peoples arrived in the decaying Roman Empire, the qualification for kingship amongst them was the possession of *Heil*: that spiritual quality, given by the (pagan) gods, which not only enabled a man to be

[3] p 124.

top-dog amongst the other warlords but gave him success in battle (*Siegesheil*). Even if the hereditary principle was followed, down a royal line, more important still was the possession of *heil*. Now *Heil* was commonly believed to be replenished by the shedding of blood – so, to continue to be successful, a warrior-king needed always to be fighting[4]. Absolute loyalty and unquestioning obedience were expected from subordinates – and men, in turn, expected this from their wives and children: not the ideal recipe for healthy family life.

Honour was a concept inextricably linked to *Heil*. Royal protocol today reflects in a purely ceremonial way something that could be a life-and-death issue in those pagan days (and afterwards, for that matter). Sovereignty was 'power to rule', but there was a proper attitude of respectful behaviour and deference that went with that, which was expected to be exercised towards a sovereign.

With the arrival of the renewed Christendom, success in battle was still vital for kings. What changed, though, was the way they came by the 'magic' that validated their office – which was now through the Church's consecrating them with anointing oil. Their anointing would give them what the prophet Samuel had imparted to King David (and this, indeed, became the Christendom model of kingship). Christendom kings believed themselves to have wide-ranging spiritual powers of the kind manifested in David. Of particular importance to the kings of France and England was the 'king's touch', by which they reckoned to heal scrofula, the 'King's Evil', a kind of tuberculosis. The original Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Church (after the Reformation) contained a ceremony for this. King Henry IV of France (r. 1589-1610; a Protestant who turned Catholic to make his position tenable) is reported as touching and healing as many as 1,500 people at a time.[5] The fighting leader as healer!

[4] Given the demonic dynamic here, the belief was doubtless correct. Subordinates would also share in this *Heil*, but to a lesser degree.
[5] I haven't come across any objective research on this subject, though, as yet.

The Holy Roman Empire of the German People

In 936, Otto I inherited a Holy Roman Empire which needed the Charlemagne treatment again. His brothers didn't accept the fact that their father had made Otto his sole heir – so there was civil war, which Otto did well to survive. The fierce, marauding Magyars (Hungarians) from the east joined the rebellion. Finally, Otto crushed them at the celebrated battle of the Lech Field in 955, the greatest battle of that century. Resistance to Otto ceased. The Hungarians settled, were converted to (Catholic) Christianity – or, at least, Christianised – and so became part of Western Europe. Otto's achievement had been as significant for Europe's future as Charles Martel's victory over the Muslim invaders in 732. In February 962, in St Peter's in Rome, the pope crowned Otto emperor. If his empire was modelled on Charlemagne's, it was German and laid no claim to what was becoming France. But he did make sure that he dominated the papacy.

One problem the feudal system didn't really solve for emperors and kings was the accumulation of power and wealth by the aristocratic rulers across their territories – to the detriment of whatever central power was possible. The development of the hereditary principle amongst the aristocracy exacerbated this. Otto came up with a solution. He endowed the Church with large tracts of land, and gave it immunity from the secular authorities. This, in addition to the governmental authority he granted them, gave bishops and abbots considerable influence – and established them as another power across the land. Because these proved to be a remarkable body of men, the most important positive result may be what has become known as 'the Ottonian Renaissance' – an educational and cultural advance as striking as the one sponsored by Charlemagne. The most negative result was the 'success' of the holy war waged against the heathen Wends (Slavs), who were seen as the enemy of both 'State' and 'Church'. 'Every successive stage in the conquest was marked by the foundation of new bishoprics,' says R.H.C. Davis, 'each one situated in a fortress and

dominating the country which was to be subdued and converted to Christianity.'[6] It wasn't considered remotely inappropriate that a bishop should bear arms and lead military campaigns. The civilisation that had been the Roman Empire was the inspiration of these newly-educated men from a barbarian background – not the Kingdom of Heaven. Here Christendom had sunk to a new, yet-less-Christian level. But things would grow still worse.

From now on, the Holy Roman Empire and the popes tended to be rivals. In many ways, this rivalry would define the dynamics of European political life for centuries. The kings of France, for their part, would pursue an alliance with the papacy – whilst proving themselves the most trying of friends for the popes. The papacy's aim of aligning itself with a reliable secular power was proving virtually impossible to realise: there was too much pursuit of self-interest on both sides.

External pressures

ISLAM In 696 the Byzantine (Eastern Roman Empire) provinces in North Africa had been overrun by Muslim invaders. The conquerors swept on up into Spain, and their defeat of the Visigoths (711) delivered the whole of the Iberian peninsula, with the exception of a northern strip, to the Arabs. Charles Martel's defeat of these invaders in France has already been mentioned. But Islamic Spain long continued to serve as an alien presence in the emerging Western Europe which helped Christendom define itself by what it was not. The psychology of this was reinforced by the long war waged by the remnant of Catholic Spain to drive the Muslims back out of 'their' peninsula again.

Not until early in the 2nd millennium, though, would emerging-Europe's eastern boundary be tested by the Islamic world. The battle of Manzikert (1071), in which the Byzantine army was destroyed by the Seljuk Turks can be counted one of the truly decisive battles of history. Europe's defining of itself over against Islam

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would happen at a new, and more widespread, level in the Crusades – of which more later[7].

THE VIKINGS These heathen Norsemen burst quite suddenly into European history in the last decade of the 8th century with a series of terrifying attacks on the coasts of Britain, Ireland, and France. For centuries, their Scandinavian homeland had been a remote region about which Europeans knew little and cared less. It isn't clear why these raiders came – but they changed the world wherever they went. Strong rulers such as Charlemagne and, in England, King Offa of Mercia, had brought Western Europe a level of peace and stability it hadn't enjoyed since the fall of the Roman Empire. Consequently, most ports, towns and monasteries were undefended. The mobility of their fast, seaworthy ships allowed the Viking pirates to strike almost without warning anywhere on the coast or up navigable rivers. The geographical range of Viking activity was enormous, spanning most of the known world and going some way beyond it – to America, for instance. But they showed themselves able traders as well as raiders. At Kiev, one group established a trading post known as Rus, the nucleus from which Russia has grown. But if this exemplified their constructive genius, their extinguishing of the existing Irish Christian civilisation showed their destructive potential. As time went on they added settling to trading, and relied less on piracy. So, for example, a new Ireland came into being, through the establishing of Viking cities such as Dublin, Wexford, Waterford and Limerick. (It might be said, though, that Ireland was ruined again by another Viking, Henry II, a French-speaking, France-based, Norman-descent occupant of the English throne).

The French were able to contain the Norse invaders, but couldn't expel them. In Normandy Danish Vikings became overlords, marrying local women and adopting their French language and culture and their Catholic religion. In the

[7] This negative self-definition of the West as not-the-Islamic-world is clearly as potent today as ever – for both 'sides'.

process they created a 'civilisation' with an enormous capacity to reproduce itself. England, by contrast, was eventually overrun by the Vikings. Only after Alfred the Great defeated the Danes at Edington in the south-west of the country, did the long Anglo-Saxon fight-back begin. And, no sooner had the Saxons largely rid themselves of the Danish menace than Normans – of Danish descent – under William the Conqueror took control of the country (1066). To a considerable extent, English (Anglo-Saxon) identity has been negatively defined as not-Viking. But England is, in fact, heavily Danish, despite the national myth. And the long-term significance of the Vikings has been the sowing into European life of their influence – which has resulted in much more than the rise of the British Empire. If Islam remained an external threat, the Vikings changed over time into an internal one – and then became yet another part of the European family.

A NOTE ON CASTLE-BUILDING The highly mobile form of warfare waged by the Vikings led to a complete re-thinking of defensive strategy in western Europe. The problem was that the Vikings moved so quickly. It might be three weeks before the king's army arrived at the place from which the Viking presence had been reported. By that time they would have been long gone. They would hide their boats and ride overland on their own, or captured, horses when they'd gone as far as they could upriver – or they might carry their boats to another waterway, and return by a quite different route. The ideal response was to form a navy for protection. King Alfred of Wessex tried this, but with mixed results. The challenge was to come by enough seamen who could match the Vikings' skill and daring – and this proved impossible.

> More feasible was the scheme of building fortified towns or castles at strategic points, in order to block the routes which the Vikings would most naturally use. If they waned to ensure the means of a safe retreat, the Vikings would not dare to pass such fortified towns without destroying them. They would have to besiege them, and if the defence was sufficiently obstinate the Vikings might be detained for several weeks. Such a delay would give the royal army its chance; cumbersome

> though it was, it might arrive in time to fight a battle before the enemy disappeared. This system of defence by means of fortified towns or castles was very widely employed, for it was equally effective whether the enemy came by land or sea, and whether he was Hungarian, Saracen, or Viking.[8]

The challenge, again, was to man these fortified places – which in this case did turn out to be feasible. Overall, such an advance in defensive strategy led to important developments in European life: new towns (when more towns were needed); improved building methods (which would significantly assist in the new wave of cathedral building just about to begin); a renewed ability of kings to govern their territories (although local rulers could also build new power bases associated with castles and fortified towns); and economic growth.

The end of the first Millennium

R. W. Southern characterises the period c. 700 – c. 1050 as ‘The Primitive Age’. But during this time the platform for the future Europe was being developed:

> The first thing that stands out in this period is the inferiority of western Europe to its Greek and Moslem neighbours. The Greek political and religious system was the direct descendant of the Christian Roman Empire and therefore the rival of the Latin West on its own ground; Islam, on the other hand, offered itself as an alternative to the whole Christian and Roman tradition, and was therefore the enemy of Greeks and Latins alike. Both the Greek and Islamic systems were immensely richer, more powerful, and intellectually more sophisticated than that of western Europe. The West was the poor relation of Byzantium, making, after the manner of poor relations, strident claims to a superiority which were derisory by any objective test. Similarly with Islam. Moslem invaders during this time occupied most of Spain, and nearly all the islands of the western Mediterranean, including Sicily. Western Christendom was a beleaguered citadel which only survived because its greatest enemy, Islam, had reached the end of its lines of communication, and its lesser enemies (the Slavs, the Hungarians, and the Vikings) were organised only for raids and plunder.

[8] R.H.C. Davis, pp 171-2.

> The situation permitted survival, and even brought about the independence of the West, but it made life very constricted. The main reason for the constriction was poverty. As a result of plague, famine, destruction, and commercial atrophy, the whole of the West was thinly populated, with no towns of more than a few thousand inhabitants, with no important industries, with a rural population practising a primitive agriculture in adverse circumstances. There are indeed signs that whenever peaceful conditions prevailed the level of the population at once rose. A powerful aristocracy, which needed manpower and desired luxuries only obtainable by foreign trade, provided a basis and incentive for expansion. In judging the latent energies of this population it is a significant fact that in this period of deepest economic depression water mills, which had been known but not widely exploited in the Roman Empire, spread everywhere in north-western Europe. In England alone the imperfect statistics of Domesday Book record the existence of some six thousand mills in 1086. Clearly it would be wrong to characterise as stagnant a society which (in contrast to the society of the ancient world) took readily to the exploitation of mechanical power; but its powers of organisation and expansion were limited, and men were more conscious of their powerlessness than of their modest and unnoticed expansive energies.[9]

But from around 900, despair and the recognition of failure started to give way to hope and a new sense of success. Often what was envisaged was more a restoring of the glories of the past. This would change, imperceptibly, over time as innovations started to creep in, and new styles of architecture or ways of living began to be adopted. Part of the shift towards optimism seems to have come from a negative factor: the ending of the Viking, Islamic, and Hungarian raids.

Another factor was the passing of the year 1000. There seems to have been a widespread fear, as the date approached, that the world would come to an end at this point (and people clearly didn't feel ready for that). Of course, when that fear proved unfounded, widespread joy and optimism accompanied the relief at finding themselves in what felt like a new era. This manifested itself in every aspect of life, political, economic, cultural and – not least – religious. In particular there was an explosion of church-building.

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[9] pp 27-8

Bill Risebero in *The Story of Western Architecture* gives a thumbnail sketch of the times:

> In the rest of Europe [outside Spain], during the late 9th century, with trade at a standstill and society torn either by invasion or by the political struggles of local barons, creative cultural activity might have seemed a thing of the past. Yet out of the situation grew, during the 10th century, a series of developments which set the scene for a cultural renaissance to dwarf that of Charlemagne and rival imperial Rome.
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> The stringent economic situation of the 9th century had forced a number of trading cities on the edge of western Europe to forge strong links with Byzantium and Islam in order to survive. Naples, Ravenna, Milan, Amalfi, Pisa, Pavia, and above all Venice were thus, during the 9th and 10th centuries, working their way towards the economic forefront of Europe. In addition, Viking domination of the northern coasts had linked northern Europe, from Britain to Russia, by trade routes. From these two developments would eventually emerge the two main trading systems of medieval Europe, based on the Lombardic league of Italian trading towns in the south and on the Hanse[10] in the north.
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> At the same time, with the gradual expansion of northern agriculture, it was now possible to support a greater number of people. Population increased and towns, which had been in a state of decline since the late Roman Empire, began slowly to revive. The feudal system and general economic uncertainty had made the countryside the basis for economic life. Few western towns still existed as trading centres of any importance. Some had been converted into tribal homesteads; others had been chosen as the seats of bishops or as sites for abbeys, retaining the outward appearance of urban communities but with no economic significance. Urban populations were much smaller than in Roman times, many old buildings had been used as quarries for building stone, and large areas of cultivated land now lay within old city boundaries. But the gradual migration of people from the countryside into the cities changed their character. From the start, urban people could claim freedom from feudal ties, so towns became centres for thought and action, of progress and radicalism, the spearheads of an eventual revolution in the social order.

[10] The Hanse – or Hanseatic League – was a north-German trading association based on the Baltic ports.

> The feudal system, when not firmly controlled at the top, had resulted in ambitious, 'over-mighty' barons, with consequent political instability. After a succession of weak rulers, Otto the Great (936-73) in Germany and Hugh Capet (987-96) in France re-established strong central government, and cultural developments could once more take place. Similar anarchy had prevailed in the Church; for many rich land-owning bishops and abbots, corrupt practices such as simony had become a way of life. The Cluniac movement now sought to purify the Church by the strict application of Benedict's Rule. The emperor Otto III (d. 1002) saw Cluny as a force to help unify the Empire[11]; his support for it established a new era of co-operation between the Empire and the Church.[12]

Cluny, in Burgundy, had become a mega-monastery. More powerful than the papacy at the turn of the Millennium, it would soon produce a stream of popes. Cluny was very strongly top-down hierarchical. Whenever another monastery wanted to link with it – as often happened – all its property had to be signed over to Cluny, and every monk had offer obedience directly to the Abbot of Cluny: obedience to his own abbot wasn't sufficient. This also happened whenever – again common – the Pope asked Cluny to reform another monastery.

Cluny focussed on elaborating the Christian liturgy and associated ritual. Along with this went a commitment to the lavish decoration of church buildings. In 981, their own rebuilt Abbey Church, 'Cluny II', was consecrated. It represented a new architectural era, the birth of the Romanesque style, and a considerable technical advance[13]. In buildings such as this, St Martin's, Tours, and St Michael's Hildesheim in Germany (also Cluniac), many chapels were included, which allowed all the priests to say mass every day. Liturgical worship in these places happened 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year!

New developments in monasticism

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[11] By 'Empire' here is meant the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German People.'
[12] 2001 (3rd edn.); London; Herbert Press; ISBN 0 7136 5946 7; pp 54-57.
[13] Romanesque architecture is characterised by round arches. The most famous examples of buildings in this style are perhaps the Leaning Tower of Pisa (and the associated cathedral for which it is the – separate – *campanile* or bell-tower) and Durham Cathedral.

Cluny, powerful though it had become, wasn't going to have the field to itself. Just up the road from Cluny, at Cîteaux, a rival Benedictine order, the Cistercians, was launched in 1098. Hostile towards Cluny, its aim was to revive the original intention of St Bendict's Rule. Buildings and worship were to be simple and unadorned. And the monks would work, as well as study and pray (unlike the Cluny monks who didn't work, as Benedict had intended monks should). Devotion to the Virgin Mary was at the heart of their spirituality. This (thoroughly unscriptural) prayer of St Bernard of Clairvaux gives the flavour:

> Remember, O most gracious Virgin, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To thee I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions; but in thy clemency hear and answer me. Amen.

St Bernard, the most famous of the Cistercians, wasn't actually their founder – but, very early on, he provided the leadership which imparted such momentum to the order's growth. By 1152 they had 328 abbeys, by 1200, 525, and by 1300, 694 – from Portugal and Spain to Wales, Sweden, Poland and Hungary: a truly international network. All the monasteries were linked by a federal type of structure – very different from Cluny's controlling ways. That said, Cistercian discipline was severe. R.W. Southern has this to say about them:

> The first Cistercians spoke equally confidently with two voices. The first was the voice of the military aristocracy from which they sprang, and this voice is most clearly heard in their legislation. The second voice was the one they used in the cloister – it was the voice of mutual friendship, of introspection and spiritual sweetness. Here we have the typically puritan paradox of the Cistercians. They rose to eminence in the midst of the most crudely expansive period in medieval history and were the most articulate prophets of this expansion … It was not an accident that the chief Crusading orders adopted the Cistercian rule, for there was a close affinity in their aims and methods. The Cistercians were essentially a frontier organisation engaged in a work of colonisation which was partly religious, partly

> military, and partly agrarian. No one – least of all the Cistercians themselves – knew where one type of colonisation ended and the other began. They scarcely needed to know, for they all led to the growth of Christendom. They were the last generation of medieval men to believe that it was good for all men to be monks, or at least to belong in some degree to a monastic organisation …[14]

If the Cistercians wanted to return to St Benedict's original Rule, and sought places in the remote countryside in which to do so, the new Augustinian order focussed on the Bible as basic to Benedict's monastic values, and set up communities inspired by Augustine of Hippo's thoughts on the matter (rather than observing Benedict's Rule). Initially the movement was so informal that its origins are hard to trace. Two things, however, are clear. The Augustinians understood themselves to be called to the towns, and they intended to interact with society – to help redeem it, 'to repair the ruins of the world' as someone has put it – rather than set off into the wilderness. 'During years 1075 – 1125,' says Southern, 'new communities following the Rule of St Augustine appeared all over western Europe … and they exhibited every kind of mixture of customs. Most of these groups were small and unnoticed at first, and their spontaneity, variety, and freedom of movement stand in striking contrast to the stability of the older monasteries.'[15] One reason we know so little about them was that, unlike Benedictine monasteries, the houses of Augustinian canons (as they were known) needed no significant endowment[16] to get started. They specialised in repairing derelict churches, rescuing failing religious communities, and the like. Their achievement was recognised – and honoured – by Pope Urban II, himself a Benedictine monk of Cluny. 'According to Urban the primitive Church had had two forms of religious life: monastic and canonical[17]. In the monastic life men abandoned earthly things and gave themselves up to contemplation. In the canonical life they made use of earthly things, and redeemed with tears and almsgiving the daily sins inseparable from the world. The monks therefore played

[14] *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, p257.
[15] p242.
[16] I.e. initial investment or sponsorship.
[17] By 'canonical' is meant clergy who function out in the world, as opposed to priests who are monks.

the part of Mary, the canons that of Martha in the Church. The role of the canons was the humbler of the two, but not less necessary. Nevertheless, in the course of time, the monastic life had prospered, but (said Urban) the canonical life had almost disappeared until it was revived by [the first Augustinian canons].'[18] Monk though he was, he could see that a neglected element in the life of the early Church was being restored. (Neither the questionable history nor the dubious theology here invalidate his insight). The order didn't shine as the Cistercians did, but the large number of popes, bishops and teachers in the 1100s who were Augustinians testifies to the positive impact it was making. Martin Luther, the Reformer, rather later, would become the most famous of them all.

Reconquista

As has been mentioned, in 711 Muslims from north Africa invaded the Iberian peninsula and brought about the destruction of Visigothic Spain. The invaders soon took Toledo, the capital, almost immediately pushing on to the Pyrenees, a natural barrier – driving the rulers of Catholic Spain into the remote areas of the north-west (Asturias), in the process. Apart from that small enclave, by 719 the conquest was complete. When the Muslims arrived, Iberia already had a relatively large Jewish population. Now all three major monotheistic religions were represented on the peninsula – and this would turn out to be of the greatest significance for the emerging Europe.

The Arabs called their Muslim Kingdom al-Andalus. In 756 it became a politically independent emirate, although it still recognised the religious supremacy of the caliphate in Baghdad. Although the Christians in the north sought to exploit divisions amongst the Muslims, al-Andalus prospered. In 778, a Frankish expedition against (Islamic) Saragossa failed, and the rearguard of the army was destroyed while retreating back to France – an event remembered in the

[18] p244

Chanson de Roland, one of the epic poems of the Middle Ages[19]. Within al-Andalus, as elsewhere, the Muslims treated their non-Muslim subjects (Christians and Jews) with a tolerance rather greater than that shown at the time in most Christian countries to religious minorities:

> Christians could continue to practice their religion, and no attempt at forcible conversion to Islam was made. There were some minor restrictions regarding the public display of Christianity: not allowed were public Masses and public processions as well as the ringing of church bells. In addition, Christians paid significantly higher taxes than the Muslims, as did the Jews. The Christians, however, with their churches still standing and their bishops still in place, continued much as before the conquest. Yet the powerful Arabic culture had a penetrating influence. Large numbers, while remaining Christians, adopted Arabic ways, including the Arabic language. They were called simply Mozarabs (i.e. like-the-Arabs): cultural Arabs and religious Christians … The Christian scriptures were translated and annotated in Arabic …[20]

But, from almost immediately after the conquest, the tiny, barbarous Catholic 'kingdoms' in the northern enclaves committed themselves to the eventual reconquest (*reconquista*) of the Peninsula. Indeed, by around 1050, the borders of al-Andalus had been pushed back (south) to a line running from just south-west of Barcelona, passing south of Salamanca, and across to Oporto on the Atlantic coast.

In 929 the ruler of al-Andalus, Abd al-Rahman III assumed the title caliph and, becoming fully independent, al-Andalus entered its golden age. This would last until early in the new millennium. From then on al-Andalus began to disintegrate, and in 1031 the caliphate ceased to exist, being replaced by more than ten little kingdoms. From 1086 the Almoravids of North Africa took over, and restored unity; as did the Almohads who had succeeded them by the mid-1100s. But in 1236 Islamic power began to crumble again, and the Christians proceeded to

[19] 'Christians are right, pagans are wrong', boldly declared the poem – a sentiment which seemed to sum up the attitude of the Crusaders, later on, who loved it.
[20] F. Donald Logan, *The Church in the Middle Ages*; p265.

reconquer virtually the whole peninsula (Granada excepted). The way this happened will be referred to in the next section, on the Crusades.

The Crusades

In March 1095 the Byzantine emperor Alexius I sent a delegation to ask Pope Urban II for help against the Seljuk Turks who had overrun most of the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire and were within striking distance of the capital, Constantinople. Urban had already planned that on a forthcoming visit to France he would appeal to western European knights to come to the aid of the Christians in the East – despite the fact that in 1054 the Pope at that time had excommunicated his opposite number, the then patriarch of Constantinople, and this had led to a final breach between the (Eastern) Orthodox and (Roman) Catholic churches. But to this he linked another idea, which may have been around in papal circles for over twenty years: a pilgrimage to Jerusalem which was also a war to free it from pagan – i.e. Islamic – occupation. (The city had fallen to Muslim Arabs as long before as 636, and pilgrimage to the holy places since then had continued virtually unhindered). So at Clermont[21] in south central France on 27 November 1095 Urban called what we know as the First Crusade (although no one at the time remotely realised that Pandora's Box had just been opened, or envisaged what was just about to happen). Angus Konstam in his *Historical Atlas of the Crusades* makes plain the irony of the situation:

> For years Urban had looked for a way to harness the latent martial energy of the feudal nobility and channel it in a way that could benefit the Church. Emperor Alexius's plea offered a means to do just that. It also might be used to consoloidate his spiritual authority over Christendom, by uniting all Christian secular nobles under the banner of a common cause.
>
> For years Urban had preached that violence was abhorrent. Killing was a grave sin, even if it took place as an act of war. It placed the soul of the slayer at risk unless he performed penance to the Church. By introducing the notion of a 'just war', Urban made the killing of the 'enemies of Christ' a penance in itself, an act of piety

[21] Clermont Ferrand

> and devotion. This theological twist ensured the interest of many of the knights and warlords who ravaged Europe. The initial offer required expanding to appeal to the universal desire for land and power, but at the same time the Church needed to maintain control over any crusading venture.
>
> Urban decided to grasp the opportunity. By calling for a campaign against the unholy Muslims he felt he could benefit both Europe and the Church. He also naively believed that he would be able to control the Crusaders once the expedition got underway.[22]

The story of the Crusades you'll have to read for yourself. (Get hold of one of Jonathan Riley-Smith's books on the subject, if you don't know where to look). There isn't room here to give even an outline of the extraordinary – sometimes heroic, often degenerate, nearly always sub-Christian – episodes that those campaigns involved. Only as particular aspects of the Crusades are relevant to developing Christendom will they be mentioned here.

Urban's charismatic preaching inspired tens of thousands of people from all walks of life to 'take the Cross' (wear the sign of the Cross) and join the First Crusade – indeed, so much so that the economy of Europe was disrupted. Although the Crusade's target was the Muslim occupation of Jerusalem, many crusaders, before they had even left for the Holy Land, began a vendetta against the Jews, holding them responsible for the Crucifixion. The worst outbreaks of anti-semitism occurred along the Rhine, beginning in Cologne. The Jewish community in Mainz, one of the largest in Europe was annihilated. Church leaders tried, with little success to stop these outbreaks. And every new call to crusading during the 1100s triggered fresh attacks on the Jews. But the Orthodox Christians of Byzantium also paid a price – for being 'heretics' – despite the Crusade having been called to help them, as its primary aim, in the first place. That said, Alexius was able to play the various groups of crusaders with great skill at their own game, and used them to fight his enemies the Turks.

[22] 2002; Ludlow, England; Thalamus (International Media Solutions); p 45.

Most significant in the long run were the Norman and other French nobles and knights – brave, disciplined, skilled and well-equipped – who formed a fighting force as capable and effective as any in that age. Their weapons they understood to be spiritual as well as physical. After a series of barely-believable adventures, this army fought its way to Jerusalem (1099). But 12,000 of them were up against 60,000 armed defenders. Even so, some of their number managed to clamber over the walls into the city. First the Muslims were slaughtered, regardless of age or gender. Entering the al-Aqsa mosque, the crusaders killed everyone they encountered, including 'a large number of imams and Muslim scholars … who had left their homeland to live lives of pious seclusion in the Holy Place'. The Jewish population had taken refuge meanwhile in the city's principal synagogues. But these the crusaders burned to the ground. Not until there were only 'Christians' left did the killing stop. Bishop Daimbert of Pisa wrote to the Pope, saying: 'If you desire to know what was done with the enemy who were found there, know that in Solomon's Porch and in his Temple our men rode in the blood of Saracens up to the knees of their horses.' Raymond of Aguiliers gave this eye-witness account:

> In all the … streets and squares of the city, mounds of heads, hands and feet were to be seen. People were walking quite openly over dead men and horses. But I have as yet described only the minor horrors … If I described to you what I actually saw you would not believe me … What an apt punishment! The very place that had endured for so long blasphemies against God was now masked in the blood of the blasphemers … Once the city had been captured it was most rewarding to see the devotion of the pilgrims before the Holy Sepulchre; how they clapped their hands, singing a new song to the Lord.

Of all the massacres in the Crusades, this was the worst. As someone whose first career was in the military, I want to ask: what religion exactly is this? At what point does Christianity cease to be Christianity, and the Church cease to be the Church?

Anyway, this crusade and its successors in the Holy Land failed in their basic objectives, except very temporarily. The story was different, though, in the Iberian peninsula, where the Reconquista was understood as a Crusade – even if Muslim occupation wouldn't cease finally in Spain until 1492. There military-religious orders, which had come into being for the purposes of Holy Land Crusading – the Knights Templar in particular – strengthened the indigenous Iberian military brotherhoods such that the advantage now lay with the Catholic side.

THE TEMPLARS The rise of the Knights Templar proved to be one of the most significant developments resulting from the First, and subsequent Crusades. They weren't the only military-religious order – the Knights Hospitallers, for instance, were of similar size and prestige – but it's their subsequent influence that gives them a unique position in Europe's story. Hugues de Payen, lord of the castle of Martigny in Burgundy and founder of the Templars (1019?), was one of the more serious-minded of the Frankish Crusaders. Becoming the self-appointed protector of Christian pilgrims on the dangerous road from the port of Jaffa (Joppa) to Jerusalem, this eccentric man recruited seven other French knights to help him – and they all took a solemn oath in front of the patriarch to protect pilgrims and live a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. Although living in whatever old clothes were given them, they still managed to impress King Baldwin II of Jerusalem, who gave these 'Poor Knights' a wing of the royal palace (what had been the al-Aqsa mosque; and thought to have been originally Solomon's Temple).

The order didn't remain impoverished heroes for long. In 1126 King Baldwin lost so many men in the bloody victory of Tel-Shaqab that the continued existence of the Kingdom of Jerusalem was prejudiced. He sent two of the more well-connected of the Poor Knights to France to appeal to St Bernard of Clairvaux – by far the most influential churchman in western Christendom – for help. The next year Hugues de Payens himself returned to visit Bernard (a relative). From

that point on, the Templars – whom Bernard regarded as military Cistercians – became a major force across Europe as well as in the Holy Land. The order exploded in size, many more well-connected knights and nobles joining them. Endowments of land and other gifts cascaded in their direction. A large and extensive infrastructure in Europe resourced their Crusading activities. Given that their primary role was that of policing and protection, they were entrusted with vast amounts of wealth belonging to others to keep safe and transport. It's been said of them that, being considered utterly trustworthy, they were able to form Europe's first international financial system – such that they were able to become bankers to the kings of France and England (among many others). At the same time, along with the Hospitallers (known later as the Knights of St John of Malta) – with whom they were too often at odds – they constituted Europe's most potent military force by a margin.

The Templars became fascinated by Solomon's Temple – as they understood it to be – over which their Jerusalem headquarters was built, and pilgrimage sites like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This interest influenced their building of churches for the use of the order back home. But their military commitments led them into extensive castle-building – 'monastery within, fortress without' – too. (The famous Krak-des-Chevaliers, though, was the work of the Hospitallers). Some of the Templar brothers became expert and versatile master-masons, and some of these developed advanced architectural skills rare amongst Westerners. Now Roman *collegia* responsible for the various building trades – in effect supervised trade guilds – had survived in certain towns in Medieval Europe from the time of the Western Empire. The Benedictine monastic orders, and especially the Cistercians, became the chief inheritors of the skills and traditions preserved by these guilds – and the Templars were Cistercians of a sort. But the monastic orders lived a privileged existence in Europe, exempt from the discipline and oversight of the secular powers. In the case of the Templars especially, this freedom allowed them to become the continent's foremost – and only international – sponsors of the building trades. But the Templars, and their

traditions and ceremonies, had been influenced by their interacting with Muslims and others in the Middle East[23]. This, in turn, affected Europe's new (and renewed) building trade brotherhoods and guilds over which they had such influence[24].

The time came when the King of France, at least, decided that the Templars had become far too powerful. Anyway, he owed them vast sums of money – and the easiest way to solve this problem was to do away with them (having first put intolerable pressure on the Pope of the day, who was all but his puppet). The story of the suppression (and supposed dissolution) of the Templar order, and the trial and burning at the stake (18 March 1314) of their Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, is well known. But that wasn't the complete end of the Templars. In the Iberian peninsula they were able to continue much as before, if often in a somewhat different guise. Some of the Templars seem to have ended up in Scotland where, because of the chaotic state of that nation, there was no effective government able to take action against them. Indeed, they may even have influenced the course of events there: a longstanding tradition suggests that it was a Templar contribution at the Battle of Bannockburn that made possible Robert the Bruce's surprising victory there. But the supposed Scottish connection doesn't end there. It seems that the Templar influence in Scotland metamorphosed – because of their involvement with the building trades – into what we know today as Freemasonry (the guilds of free stonemasons having transformed into lodges of 'speculative' freemasons). Of this, more later.

THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS A third military order, the Teutonic Knights, was founded during the siege of Acre in 1189-90, during the Third Crusade, originally as a hospital for German Crusaders. The order had a frustrating history in the Holy Land, but came into its own on its return to Germany – when sent to

[23] There was more contact between crusader communities and their 'enemies' than many who came out from Europe to visit them thought was remotely justifiable.
[24] For all this see Paul Naudon, *The Secret History of Freemasonry:Its Origins and Connection to the Knights Templar*, 1991 tr. 2005); Rochester, Vermont; Inner Traditions; ISBN 1-59477-028-X.

northern Europe to subdue and Christianise the pagan tribes of Prussia. The story here was one of ruthless, fanatical conquest. Once again, any relationship between the way this order conducted itself and biblical Christianity is hard (if not impossible) to discern. And how much of modern Germany's miseries – Prussia having put that nation state together, and then dominated it, after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 – derive ultimately from the way the Teutonic Order conducted itself is a question that needs further exploration. Suffice it to say, perhaps, that the German Cross emblazoned on the tanks, aircraft, etc. of the Nazi war machine was that of the Teutonic Knights[25].

THE IMPACT OF THE CRUSADES The Holy Land Crusades failed entirely in their original aims. Apart from spiritual consequences that can only be guessed at – how does God judge the launching of the Western Church of what became effectively a jihad against Jews, Greek Orthodox Christians and Muslims in his name? – the Crusaders' main achievement was to bring Christianity into considerable disrepute. The external damage has yet to be repaired, particularly in the Islamic world. But, in relation to ourselves, the Crusades dragged the Western Church to yet lower depths, and corrupted further Western Christendom (in the sense of Western society as in some way Christian).

On the other hand, Crusading hastened Europe's coming-of-age. The eastern Mediterranean was reopened to trade and travel, and Europe regained an eastward perspective (think Marco Polo; think the spice trade). Moreover, the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem – the Crusader kingdom – was the first experiment in a 'Europe Overseas'[26]. The Crusades stimulated trade and economic activity, and led to the adoption and development of more advanced political and administrative systems. In a word, they proved transformational for European life in much the same way as the First and Second World Wars, much later; nothing could ever be quite the same again.

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[25] Of course, the English flag (of St George) is nothing other than the Crusader Cross.
[26] The term is Jonathan Riley-Smith's.

ST BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX Bernard has been mentioned more than once. He seems to sum up as much of what was disturbing about his age as of what was healthy, even heroic. The pioneering work of the Cistercian order – with its considerable technological as well as spiritual benefits – could never have been what it was without him. Yet he was a passionate and influential advocate of Crusading. So much so that Pope Eugenius III appointed him chief preacher of the Second Crusade. (In St Bernard's words, 'killing for Christ' was the killing of evildoers not homicide, and 'to kill a pagan is to win glory since it gives glory to Christ'.) He was also the one who in 1147 summoned the whole German people to a crusade against the pagan Wends (Slavs), who lived across the Elbe. That said, as part of his duties he went out of his way to combat the anti-semitic rabble-rousing of the unauthorised preacher Radulf. We have noted his devotion to the Virgin. Yet it was he who reintroduced to the Western Church which for centuries had seen Christ in divine and imperial terms the idea of his humanity. And, for Bernard, Jesus is the only way to the Father – although salvation, for him, comes by the imitation of Christ that is made possible by grace (not by grace alone, through faith). The key to imitating Christ, he thinks, is constantly to focus on his humanity, his suffering, his humility, his obedience to the Father, but especially his wounds and physical sufferings. (From this a lot of modern Catholic devotion derives. But Bernard's emphasis on Christ's humanity would help move European Christianity towards its Reformation.) Scripture is vital – and all Scripture points to Christ. And he encourages a highly emotional, even passionate, spirituality – treating, as he does, the Song of Songs in thoroughly mystical fashion. Ultimately, for Bernard, imitating Christ involves taking up our own cross and following him.

The rise of the universities

By the arrival of the 2nd millennium, monastic learning had reached the point where specialist educational institutions were becoming necessary. The West

was just about to get schools and universities more-or-less as we know them anyway. But the meeting points between Islam and Catholic Christianity, in Spain and in Sicily, gave rise to contact between Muslim, Jewish, and Catholic scholars. At this time Muslim and Jewish scholarship were far in advance of anything the Catholic world knew, isolated as it had been.

The channels by which Greek learning had been passed to the Arab world was the Christian 'schools' (we might say 'colleges' or 'universities') of the Middle East, especially in Persia and Syria. The Arab rulers in Baghdad (the Abbasids) extended a warm welcome to Syrian scholars, and in 832 set up a translation school there. Islamic scholarship not only took on Greek learning in relation to astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy (among much else), but developed the thinking and understanding in all these much further. Will Durant says in *The Age of Faith* of the Islamic world of that time:

> For five centuries, from 700 to 1200, Islam led the world in power, order, and extent of government, in refinement of manners, in standards of living, in humane legislation and religious toleration, in literature, scholarship, medicine, and philosophy. … Muslim medicine led the world for half a millennium … Only at the peaks of history has a society produced, in an equal period, so many illustrious men – in government, education, literature, philology, geography, history, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, philosophy, and medicine.[27]

The two Islamic scholars whose work particularly stimulated European scholarship as our universities were being established were Avicenna (or Ibn Sina, 980-1037), a Persian, and Averroes (or Ibn Rusd, 1126-98), who came from Cordoba in southern Spain. What both Avicenna, a pious if unorthodox Muslim, and Averroes, who fell under the suspicion of the Islamic authorities and had to flee Cordoba, gave to the European intellectual project was a mixture of Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic thinking which helped move the game forward powerfully at a critical point. Help had been needed concerning the workings of

[27] Quoted in Mission Frontiers magazine for Sept-Oct 2004.

the human intellect, and the work of these scholars allowed new ways of looking at the problem. Averroes had produced so many commentaries on Aristotle's thought that he came to be known simply as 'the Commentator'. It soon became apparent that Aristotle's work was not represented in any pure form in either Avicenna's or Averroes' work, so a critical separation had to be attempted between what they said and what originally came from Aristotle himself. (The usefulness of a tool like this for any attempt to distinguish between Medieval Catholic teaching and Christianity in its original form is easy to see.) The task of rescuing 'the original Aristotle' was rendered easier because of the work of the Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), who had to flee his native Cordoba when philosophers fell under suspicion, and ended up in Cairo. What Maimondes had attempted was a rather different exercise from the two Islamic scholars: that of seeking to reconcile Aristotle with the (Hebrew) Scriptures. But it allowed another avenue for seeking to recover the genuine Aristotle – a bit like binocular vision.

The recovery of Aristotle's thought precipitated an intellectual revolution. If most of us aren't greatly interested in intellectual revolutions, we might usefully become so – because the Western world is largely the product of its past intellectual life. (If examples of the power of the intellectual enterprise are needed, think Karl Marx – or Sigmund Freud – or Albert Einstein; all Jews, incidentally). The discovery by Europe of Aristotle's biology – more respectable as proper science than some of his other work – may mark the beginning of the Western scientific enterprise. His speculative cosmology, though, based on faulty astronomical ideas, would help at a later date to define what science cannot be.

By the later 1100s the 'schools' in Paris had coalesced to form a university, in the sense of an institution of higher education possessing more than one faculty and open to scholars and students from elsewhere. Oxford was founded a little later than that, and Cambridge a little later still. These – over which the Church reckoned to exercise control – and the universities established after them, were

the chief beneficiaries of the newly discovered learning. But a university of a somewhat different kind had opened in Bologna, central Italy, earlier than Paris. It specialised in civil and canon (church) law, and enjoyed the advantage of having Europe's greatest lawyer of the day, Irnerius, teaching there from around 1095 to 1125. Also, at around the same time, the scholar who would become Europe's pre-eminent canon lawyer, Gratian, studied and taught there. The stimulus at Bologna was Justinian's law code. The Roman Emperor Justinian (r. 527-65), based in Constantinople, was the one who had tried to recover its old Western part for the Empire – ultimately in vain. But, to go with this attempt, in what proved to be the twilight years of the Empire (as such), he commissioned a codified version of all the Empire's laws. 'Between them, the fifty Decisions (531), the Institutes (533), the Digest of the Jurists (534) and the Novels (565) covered every aspect of public and private, criminal and civil, secular and ecclesiastical law. It was through the Justinian law-books that this huge heritage was transmitted to the modern world.'[28] So, because Bologna university somehow came by all this, not only was this effort of Justinian's not wasted also, but Roman law (including that of its Christendom period) became the foundation of the developing Western law tradition.

Western universities have proved a mixed blessing. For instance, in *The Holy Roman Empire* Friedrich Heer observes: 'The university of Paris founded an empire ruled by reason, an intellectual empire of the intelligentsia, one of whose functions was to provide the kings and princes of Europe with trained officials and collaborators.'[29] In other words, it raised itself up as a self-confident rival to revealed truth – as, in the end, they all would. On the other hand, the universities served as indispensable instruments for showing up invalid (and therefore unhelpful) arguments for what they were – the Church's or anyone else's. A classic example is the work of the monk-academic Abelard at Paris. He demolished the philosophical view of 'universalism' still prevailing there. He wrote

[28] Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*; p 184.
[29] p1

a work, *Yes and No*[30], in which he gathered together a large number of passages and statements of opinion, principally from the Church Fathers (the theologians of the early Church), which apparently contradicted each other. The purpose here was to have students discuss these, and find solutions to the problems. In this his motives were getting at the truth and clarity of thought, not the undermining of the faith. He also argued to good effect against the prevailing view that the teachings of Christianity can be proved. Reason can appropriately be used to refute attacks on the faith, though, he taught, and to help those open to Christianity to accept its claims (apologetics). Abelard's influence was immense, and he set a new and much higher intellectual standard for his successors.

Papal reform

The year 1049, with the death of Pope Benedict IX, saw the end of a disastrous period for the papacy, during which it had been corrupt and the plaything of local strongmen. Despite this, church reform had been taking place at an increasing rate. But it was de-centralised, initiated by local bishops, abbots and secular leaders away from Rome. 'With the coronation of Pope Leo IX (1049) the papacy began to take control of the [reform] movement,' says Donald F Logan, 'yet with the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-85) a clear shift took place. Leo and his immediate successors used papal power as a means of effecting ecclesiastical reform, but Gregory VII [otherwise known as Hildebrand] used the reforming movement as a means of enhancing papal power, or, to put it another way, he considered reform to include the enhancement of papal power. This led him into conflict with the German rulers …'[31] Considered by the post-Reformation Catholic Church the greatest pope of the Middle Ages, Gregory VII's 'Hildebrandine' reform had as its most profound – if entirely unintended – result the breakdown of the old Davidic Church-State arrangement established by

[30] *Sic et Non*
[31] *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*, p106.

Charlemagne: the Holy Roman Emperor was now his rival, not his co-ruler. The Emperor considered himself another David, and hence 'the Lord's anointed'. The Pope, on the other hand, claimed to be 'Christ's Vicar on Earth'. 'The identification of the Church with the whole of organised society', R.W. Southern has pointed out, 'is the fundamental feature which distinguishes the Middle Ages from earlier and later periods of history.'[32] This didn't change immediately, but what had happened was a basic fracture in the self-understanding of European society – with secularising consequences: government was less and less part of the religious system. The steady emergence of the nation-state mentality across Europe over the following period could only reinforce the trend. Developments like these would, in due course, allow the Reformation, when it came, viable. And as the free-thinking, and potentially secularising, universities – uncontrollable ultimately by the papacy – established themselves, there was going to be increasing tension between them and the Church; and then, at some point, an almighty collision – another factor enabling the Reformation.

But in parallel with these rival, secular powers, the papacy itself grew increasingly strong. As time went on it managed both to accumulate resources and to develop the most advanced administrative system in Europe. This made it by far the most powerful institution in the West. (Possessing such a bureaucracy also helped in the forging of documents, at which it became adept!)

From 1073 to 1119 the papacy was held by former monks, and aspired to an extreme, monastic-type reform of the Church. Gregory and his successors wanted, negatively, to separate the Church from the wicked world in which it found itself and, positively, to commit it to the ideal of Christian perfection. That ideal, they believed, was to be found in the life of a monk, but, if anyone could not become a monk, they should seek to live as much like a monk as possible in the world. A practical example of what this could lead to involved clerical celibacy. The practice of the Eastern Church was – as it still is – to allow married

[32] *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, p16.

men to become priests. In parts of the Western Church there were prohibitions on priests being married, though these were widely flouted. (Anyway, it was as well-known then as it is now that most of the apostles were married). Disregarding all this, the Second Lateran Council in 1139 ruled that not only a priest, but also a deacon and even a subdeacon could not contract a valid marriage – and if any were already married, they were to be deprived of their positions.

In a series of Councils from 1123 to 1312 the popes promulgated what were in effect their reforming edicts. They legislated on all matter of issues, from prohibiting the buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices, through restricting the voting for new popes to the Cardinals, to introducing oppressive rules and regulations applicable to the Jewish community (which made them even more vulnerable to pogroms than before).

Dissent

Dissent didn't just come in secularising forms. It manifested in religious ones too. The following were the two best-known dissenting movements of the time.

WALDENSIANS In 1173, a wealthy Spanish businessman based in Lyon, France, (Peter?) Valdès, heard the Lord's call to become an itinerant preacher. Ensuring that his wife and family were adequately provided for, he left his family behind for life on the road. Giving away his wealth to those in need, and committing himself to a life of poverty, he soon attracted followers wanting to adopt this simple and sacrificial form of ministry. Their preaching was unexceptional – largely exhortations to people to live godly lives – but the fact that they were preaching at all aroused opposition from the church authorities. It was bishops who issued permissions to preach, and then only to clergy. But here were laymen and laywomen taking it upon themselves to preach! Valdès and his followers believed that Christ's sending out of the disciples two by two constituted

all the commission they needed for their task: this was a mission for all Christians. But Pope Alexander III, discovering at the Third Lateran Council (1179) that Valdès held entirely orthodox opinions, embraced him and allowed him and his followers to continue preaching – with the proviso that the local clergy were agreeable. But very few priests would allow the Waldensians to preach; and the new archbishop appointed to Lyon in 1183 expelled them – so they ended up preaching illegally again. Their message became increasingly radical, often developing along lines anticipating themes which would be taken up again in the run-up to the Reformation.

THE CATHARS The state of the Catholic Church in the Languedoc area of southern France at this time was an acknowledged disgrace. So when a heretical movement, the Cathars, with Manichean ideas and Manichean-type commitment, penetrated that area it attracted support in a way the Catholics never would. Also active there, as a non-heretical alternative to Catholicism, were the Waldensians.

Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) made the suppression of heresy his top priority (heresy being understood as 'treason against God'). As a start he sent two Cistercians as his representatives into the Languedoc to preach against the Cathars, and then sent more. This greatly displeased the local bishops, who proved unco-operative. So disciplinary action was taken against them. The lay authorities proved even less amenable. Then in 1206 the Pope sent the Spanish bishop Diego of Osama – who took with him one of his cathedral clergy, Dominic (later St Dominic) – and twelve Cistercian abbots, telling them to preach barefoot like the Cathar preachers. In staged debates, Diego and Dominic began converting Cathars back to Catholicism. But the mission of preaching soon gave way to violent methods. In early 1208, the papal legate to Languedoc was assassinated by a knight of the recently-excommunicated Count of Toulouse. The latter, erroneously considered a Cathar sympathiser, refused even to apologise. So the Pope called what became known as the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars – another crusade within Europe – which lasted twenty

years. In late June 1209 a crusading army, led mostly by the barons of northern France, gathered in Lyon. On 22 July they arrived at Béziers, a city with a strong Cathar presence. The church of the Magdalene, crowded with frightened inhabitants, was burned down, as was the cathedral. Reputedly when the question of distinguishing Catholic from heretic was raised with the abbot of Cîteaux, he replied: “Kill them all. God will sort it out.” In such circumstances, the Waldensians in the Languedoc were inevitably going to be treated as heretics. Details of their suffering have gone largely unrecorded. The kind of action taken against Béziers was meted out to the rest of the region. But, though the crusade was, in effect, a victorious war for the French – they gained control of the Languedoc – it failed in its stated purpose. So the papacy devised a new strategy: the elimination of Catharism by trials and punishment.

In 1233 Pope Gregory IX sent members of the new order[33] founded by the preacher Dominic to go into the Langedoc, granting them considerable authority to investigate and punish heretics. The Inquisition had been born. When the inquisitors arrived in a community, they summoned the whole parish, and a sermon was preached, urging those present to assist in the rooting out of heresy. A period of grace was allowed, during which individuals could repent and be punished leniently. Then questioning of individual parishioners began, where they were encouraged to implicate others. When sufficient evidence was gathered about someone, they were confronted with a statement of the charges but not told the names of the accusers. If convicted, the person was invited to confess and repent. Punishments varied depending on the nature of the ‘offence’ and whether or not the accused co-operated. It’s estimated that around one in a hundred of those condemned were handed over to the secular authorities for execution. Sometimes even the corpses of dead heretics were exhumed and burned. Inquisition turned out to be highly effective: it achieved against Catharism what crusading was quite unable to.

[33] The Order of Preachers – or ‘Dominicans’.

The Gothic cathedrals

It's appropriate to close this chapter on a rather more positive note. The later Middle Ages are – rightly – remembered more for what was built then, than for all the injustice, death and destruction of that period. No more powerful symbol of this work of building exists than the Gothic cathedral. The appearance of the Gothic style is usually associated with the rebuilding of the choir of the abbey church and royal cathedral of St Denis – resting place of French kings – just to the north of Paris. Abbot Suger, who was also King Louis VI's senior minister, rebuilt the choir of the abbey church in 1140, so that the burial place of the French monarchy might be enhanced. In the words of Bill Riseboro: 'This building marks the appearance of the gothic style – not because it contained recognisably "gothic" features (rib vaults had already appeared at Durham and elsewhere, flying buttresses at Cluny, and pointed arches had many precedents), nor merely because they were for the first time combined into a unified design, though that is striking enough; but rather because their unique combination allowed the opportunity for a subtle change in the approach to the ordering of spaces. Though the romanesque designers divided spaces into ordered compartments, the designers of the 12th century and onwards increasingly blurred spatial divisions; columns became lighter, dividing walls less substantial, roofs freer in shape, allowing space to flow from one area into another.' And, he continues: 'The development of architecture had reached the point at which great buildings needed a specialist designer.'[34]

Someone has spoken of the 'transcendence' of Gothic architecture – that impression of experiencing another, higher world, in addition to the immediate physical structure. Riseboro comments on the significance of these stupendous buildings, which impress our generation as much as any: 'Gothic buildings stand at a crucial transition-point in history, between the church-dominated early Middle Ages and the free secular world of the Renaissance. It is perhaps this very fact

[34] *The Story of Western Architecture*; p83.

which makes them arguably the finest achievements in the history of western architecture; they are the perfect expression of the dialectical[35] tension between two worlds: between religious faith and analytical reason, between the serene, closed monastic society of the old order and the dynamic expansionism of the new.'[36] So, in one, they're monuments to a passing age. But what monuments!

What isn't obvious now is how much competition there often was between cities and regions to have a more impressive cathedral than someone else's. They were all raised to the glory of something. What isn't clear is that it was always to God's glory.

[35] dialectical = the clash of opposites
[36] p84