

Christian
History II:
500-1000



History according to college students who had trouble with their notes or comprehension or something....

- Pharaoh forced the Hebrew slaves to make bread without straw. Moses led them to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients. Afterwards, Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the ten commandments. David was a Hebrew king, skilled at playing the liar. He fought with the Philatelists, a race of people who lived in Biblical times. Solomon, one of David's sons, had 500 wives and 500 porcupines.
- During the Renaissance, America began. Christopher Columbus was a great navigator who discovered America while cursing about the Atlantic. His ships were called the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Fe. Later the Pilgrims crossed the Ocean, and this was called Pilgrim's Progress. When they landed at Plymouth Rock, they were greeted by Indians, who came down the hill rolling their was hoops before them. The Indian squabs carried porpoises on their back. Many of the Indian heroes were killed, along with their cabooses, which proved very fatal to them. The winter of 1620 was a hard one for the settlers. Many people died and many babies were born. Captain John Smith was responsible for all this.



During the Middle Ages this began to be seen all over Europe and has continued to appear over rooftops to this day. Why?

Pope Gregory I [d. 604] said that the rooster "was the most suitable emblem of Christianity", being "the emblem of St Peter."

The 9th century Pope Nicholas I ordered the figure to be placed on every church steeple – a warning against denying Christ.

“On the last, cold day of December in the dying year we count as 406, the Rhine river froze solid, providing the natural bridge that hundreds of thousands of hungry men, women, and children had been waiting for. They were the *barbari*—to the Romans an undistinguished, matted mass of Others, not terrifying, just troublemakers, annoyances, things one would rather not have to deal with—non-Romans. To themselves they were, presumably, something more, but as the illiterate leave few records, we can only surmise their opinion of themselves.

Neither the weary, disciplined Roman soldiers, ranked along the west bank, nor the anxious, helter-skelter tribes amassing on the east bank could have been giving much thought to their place in history. But this moment of slack, this relative calm before the pandemonium to follow, gives us the chance to study the actors on both sides of this river and to look backward on what has been and forward to what will be....”

Alaric and his Visigoths moved on down through Italy to Rome and surrounded the city. The Roman representatives came out to negotiate with the German chieftain.

“The envoys quickly recognized that their man was no fool. All right then, what was the price of his departure? Alaric told them his men would sweep through the city, taking all gold, all silver and everything of value that could be moved. They would also round up and cart off every barbarian slave.

But, protested the hysterical envoys, what will that leave us? Alaric paused, “Your lives!”

In that moment Roman security died and a new world was conceived.”

-Cahill, Thomas. How the Irish Saved Civilization. Chapter one. Knopf Doubleday Publishing

The organizing force of western civilization was passing away with the death of the Roman empire in the west - and Christendom was being born as the only remaining cultural power.



It is not wise or intellectually healthy to ignore the work of the Holy Spirit in minds of believers over the past 2000 years. If you are only familiar with the first century and the Reformation church, what has God revealed through His people that you have missed?

Christianity, in contrast to Islam, did not see truth as final and settled in the first century but rather built on the foundation of the New Testament by looking for the implications of revealed points of truth.

Western civilization and the massive progress of human thinking in the West grew out of the interpretation of Christian and classical thinking giving us huge leaps forward in:

Theories of government

Science

Medicine

Equality of women and minorities

Economics

Law and justice

Agriculture

Views of war

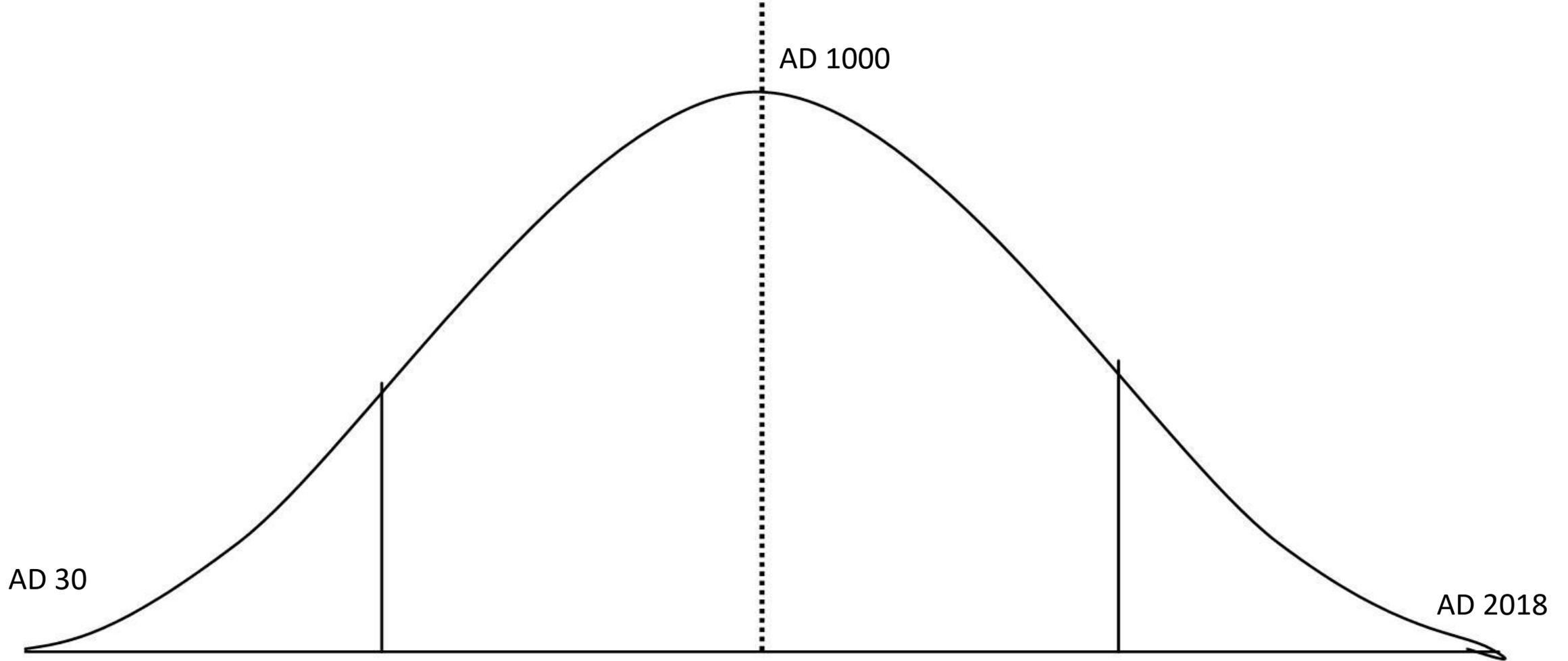
Systematic theology



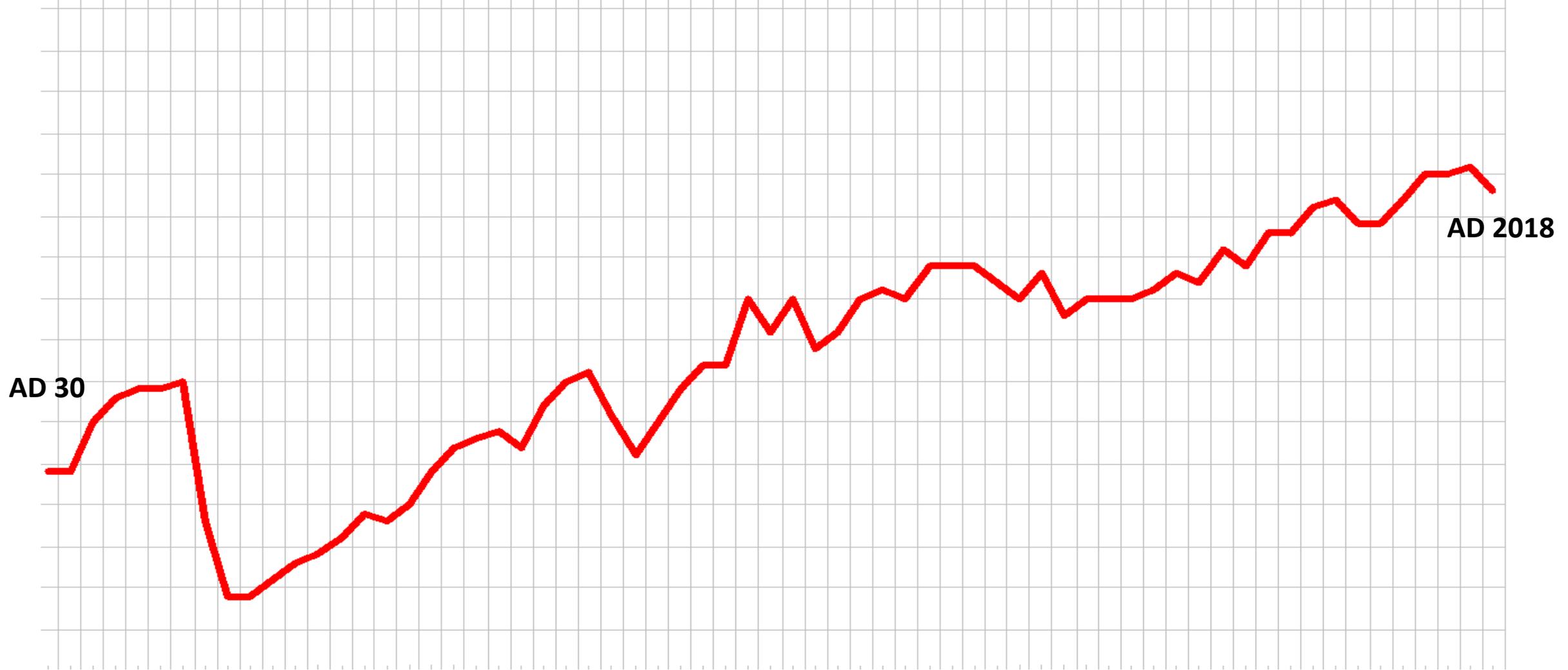
Getting History Right means understanding the worldview of that generation being studied.



- Sometimes we hear of the director's careful reconstruction of history that is so precise that every rivet matches reality.
- Then they put into the mouths of their actors thoughts and words that would never be said by that generation.



- As we approach the Middle Ages we have this question: **what was the high point of Christianity in the past 2000 years?**
- Did the massive influence that the Church had in the medieval period reflect the best version of the Kingdom of God?
- Did the fact that the Deity of Christ was recognized in every major city in Europe represent the mustard tree growth?
- Does the weakness of the Church in our culture reflect the decline of civilization?
- Does the emphasis on the here and now diminish our view of the afterlife?



- Or is this a better presentation of the history of Christianity with ups and downs but gradual progress?
- Does the fact that the creeds build upon the previous versions reflect improved thinking and greater consistency in interpreting God's revealed word?
- Take the view of women as an example, does anyone think that we should return to a Middle Ages view of women or take away their right to vote?

[How this medieval period of western civilization is viewed/taught today.]

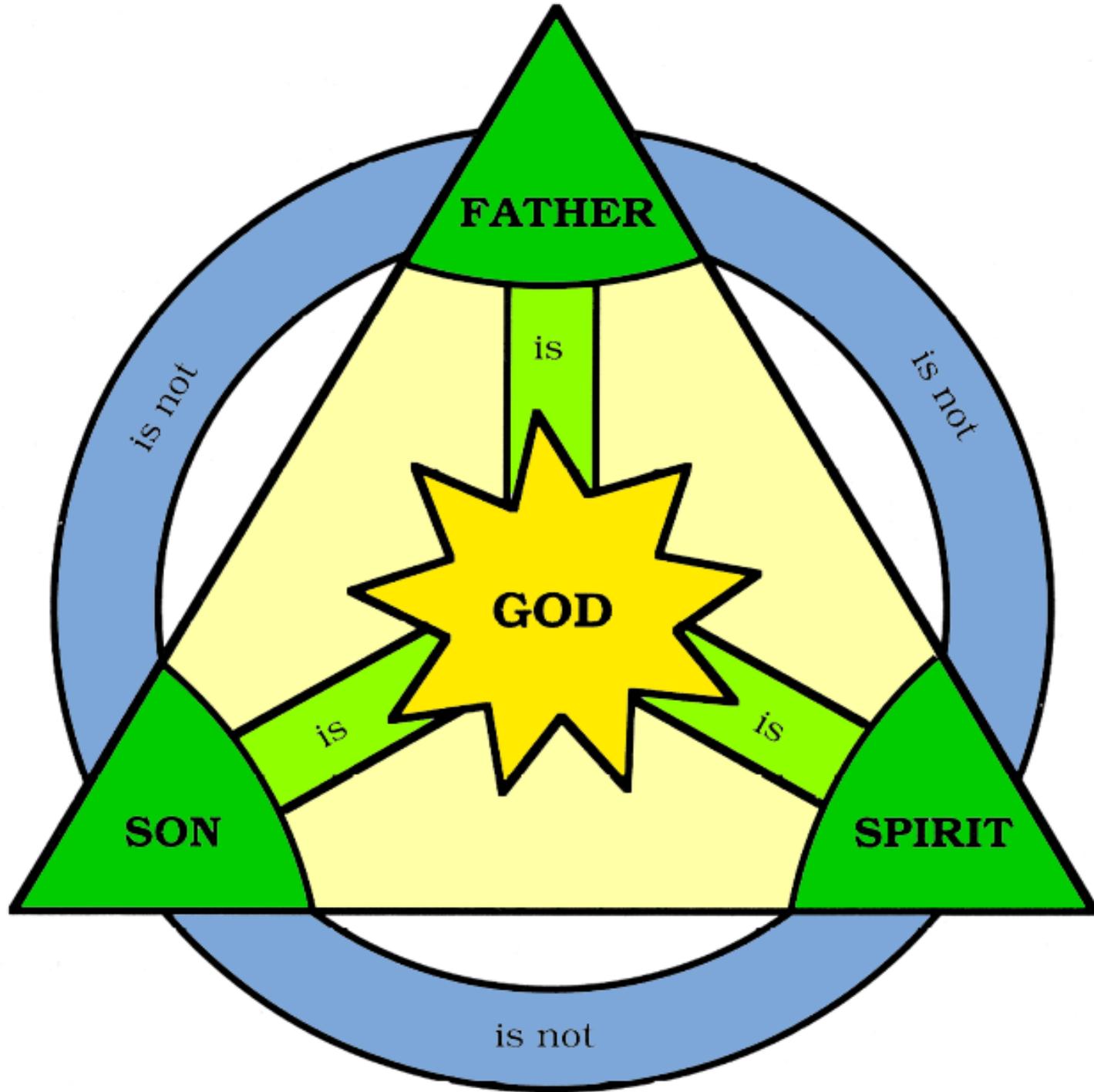
“Hence modernity’s first great attempt to define itself: an “age of reason” emerging from and overthrowing an “age of faith.” Behind this definition lay a simple but thoroughly enchanting tale. Once upon a time, it went, Western humanity was the cosseted and incurious ward of Mother Church; during this, the age of faith, culture stagnated, science languished, wars of religion were routinely waged, witches were burned by inquisitors, and Western humanity labored in brutish subjugation to dogma, superstition, and the unholy alliance of church and state. Withering blasts of fanaticism and fideism had long since scorched away the last remnants of classical learning; inquiry was stifled; the literary remains of classical antiquity had long ago been consigned to the fires of faith, and even the great achievements of “Greek science” were forgotten till Islamic civilization restored them to the West. All was darkness.

Then, in the wake of the “wars of religion” that had torn Christendom apart, came the full flowering of the Enlightenment and with it the reign of reason and progress, the riches of scientific achievement and political liberty, and a new and revolutionary sense of human dignity. The secular nation-state arose, reduced religion to an establishment of the state or, in the course of time, to something altogether separate from the state, and thereby rescued Western humanity from the blood-steeped intolerance of religion. Now, at last, Western humanity has left its non-age and attained to its majority, in science, politics, and ethics. The story of the travails of Galileo almost invariably occupies an honored place in this narrative, as exemplary of the natural relation between “faith” and “reason” and as an exquisite epitome of scientific reason’s mighty struggle during the early modern period to free itself from the tyranny of religion. This is, as I say, a simple and enchanting tale, easily followed and utterly captivating in its explanatory tidiness; its sole defect is that it happens to be false in every identifiable detail.”

Hart, David Bentley. *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (pp. 33-34). Yale University Press. Kindle Edition.

Rome vs New Rome: who is the head of the Church on earth?





It took several centuries to work out the theological implications of the Old and New Testaments.

- The Trinity
- The human and divine natures of Christ
- The nature of man
- The role of the Holy Spirit
- The relationship of spirit and body in humans



Glendalough, Ireland
Established by St. Kevin
in about 700.

The Irish became a
redemptive force in
Western Civilization:
Scholars and artists.
[read Thomas Cahill]

Western civilization
was saved both by the
Irish and the Greeks.



Irish monks lived in stone “beehive” huts and contemplated divine things. They copied and memorized scripture. A life of meditation. How is this an implication of the New Testament?



The Gallarus Oratory on the Dingle peninsula in West Ireland. This little church is typical of Irish architecture using drystone stacked walls with no mortar.

No roof leaks for the last 1400 years!

A small window on the east provides light for an altar. The Christian monks used the same technique to build their beehive stone huts. There are plenty of these stones as you can see in the fences in the background.



The remnants of the Clonmacnoise Monastery on the Shannon River in central Ireland today.

Ireland is a good place to see the culture of early Christianity because the Irish had no money and left the early structures in place for the last 15 centuries.

Clonmacnoise, Ireland as it would have appeared in 800.





Preying on the Pray-ers.

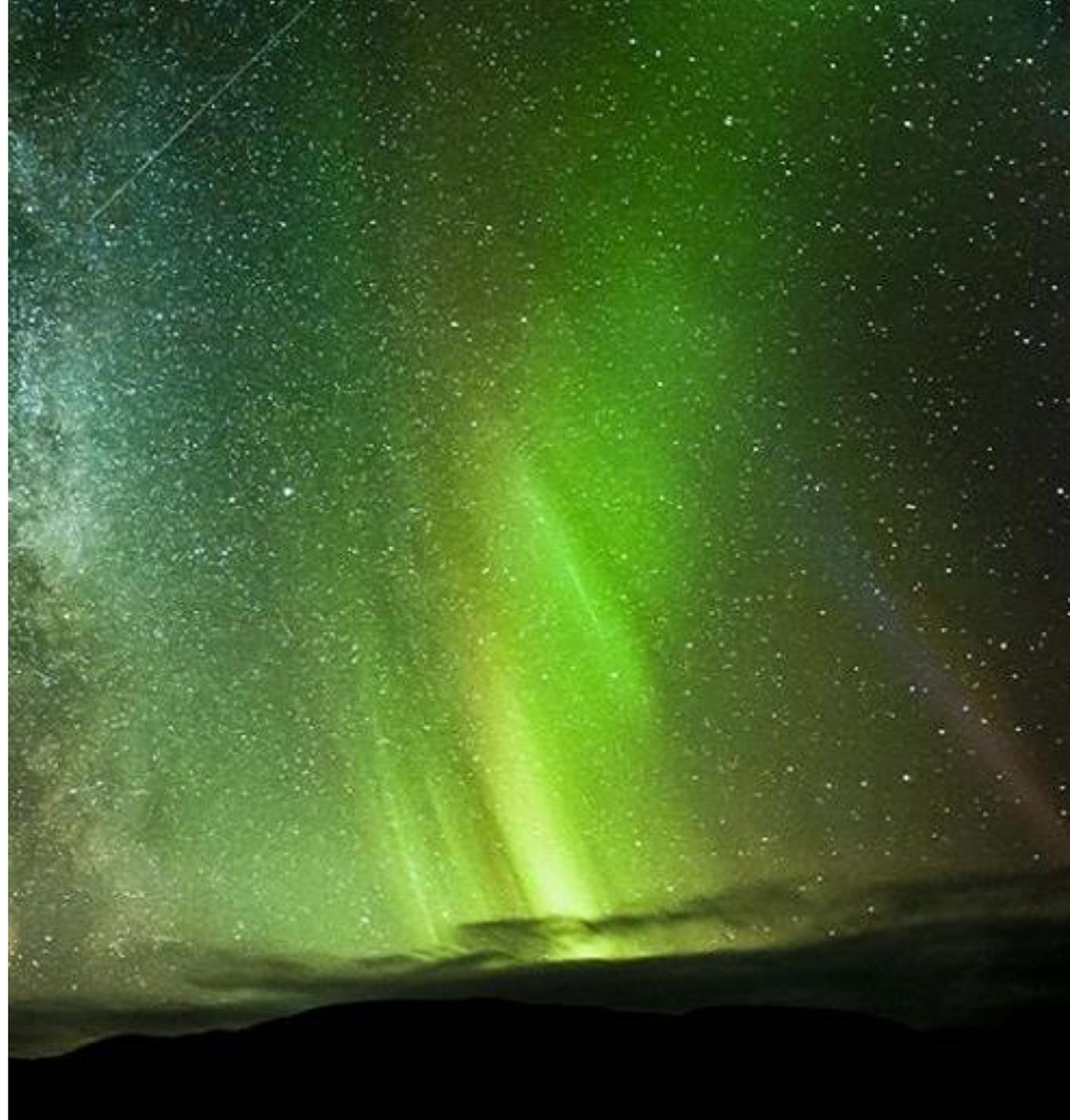
Looking out from Clonmacnoise Monastery to the River Shannon, you can see how easy it was for the Vikings, with their low draft long boats, to invade Ireland in the 800's.

The gold and silver instruments of worship guarded by a few monks were easy prey.

“The Greeks -Aristotle no less than Plato – as well as the great medieval thinkers, held that not only physical, sense perception, but equally man’s spiritual and intellectual knowledge, included an element of pure, receptive contemplation, or as Heraclitus says, of ‘listening to the essence of things.’”

"It is necessary for the perfection of human society that there should be men who devote their lives to contemplation." -Thomas Aquinas

If God has no material substance, how can we imagine Him except with our mind’s eye?

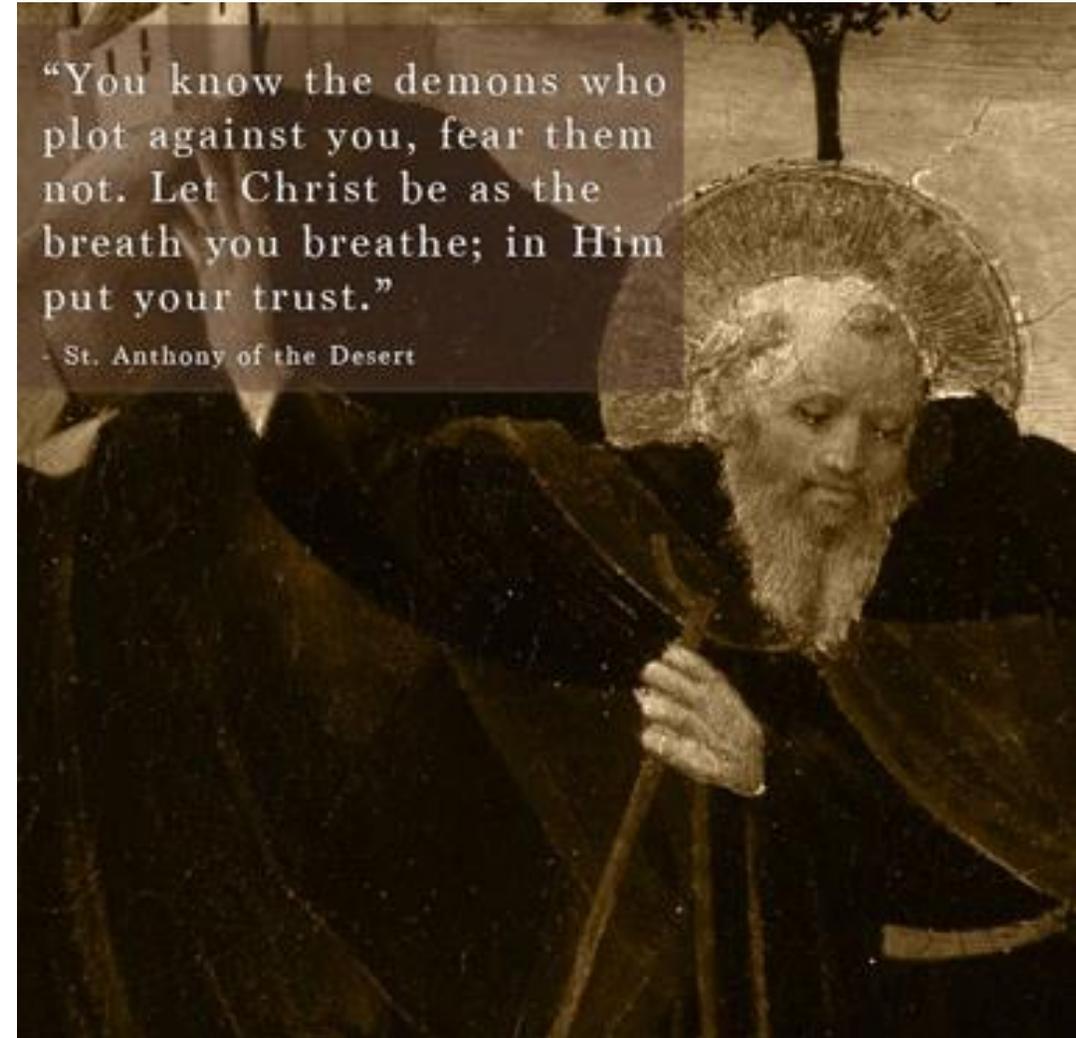


שׁוֹדֵף

- This is the Hebrew word for holy – *quadosh*. Its root meaning is “other” which means different and separate from everything else.
- God is “other” because He is not contained by the creation. He is not the sun or the moon or a giant oak tree as ancient pagans believed. He exists apart from evil even though evil exists in the creation that He spoke into being.
- That is why the Big Ten [commandments] includes a prohibition against worshipping God as part of the created order of things. He is Spirit and must be “worshipped in spirit and truth” as Christ told us.
- What does this mean in our worship? How do we see Him if He is invisible? How is the *imago Dei* to be understood if it is entirely non-physical?
- In the old world [8000 BC until AD 1700], all events of life were directly related to the physical world. Storms, crop failure, the death of livestock or of family members, sickness, etc. - all were controlled by spiritual beings/forces.
- How different we think today after principles of physics, chemistry and biology are known. How should we think about this theologically?

Sometime around the year 270, a twenty year old boy called Anthony (251-356), a Christian who had been raised in Egypt, entered a church and **Christian monasticism was born**. After giving away all his possessions, Anthony went alone to live in the desert. Although he returned to the "old world" several times in his life, he continued to live in solitude for the rest of his life. In the desert he prayed and supported his existence by manual labor. He soon became famous for his holiness and men came to live near him, and imitate his solitary existence. Anthony clearly embraced the ascetic life, a form of existence which became increasingly popular after Christianity had been made the favored religion of the Roman Empire. **Now that martyrdom was no longer possible, many people saw in Anthony, a new way of demonstrating their devotion to God. This expression of the Faith now explodes with followers.**

*He went into the church pondering these things, and just then it happened that the Gospel was being read, and he heard the Lord saying to the rich man, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." It was as if by God's design he held the saints in his recollection, and as if the passage were read on his account. Immediately Antony went out from the Lord's house and gave to the townspeople the all of his possessions. (Saint Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony*)*



"You know the demons who plot against you, fear them not. Let Christ be as the breath you breathe; in Him put your trust."

- St. Anthony of the Desert

Hesychasm – learning to be quiet.

The hesychast interprets Jesus's injunction in the Gospel of Matthew to "go into your closet to pray" to mean that one should ignore the senses and withdraw inward. Objective: to see Christ in your mind as he appeared at the Transfiguration event.

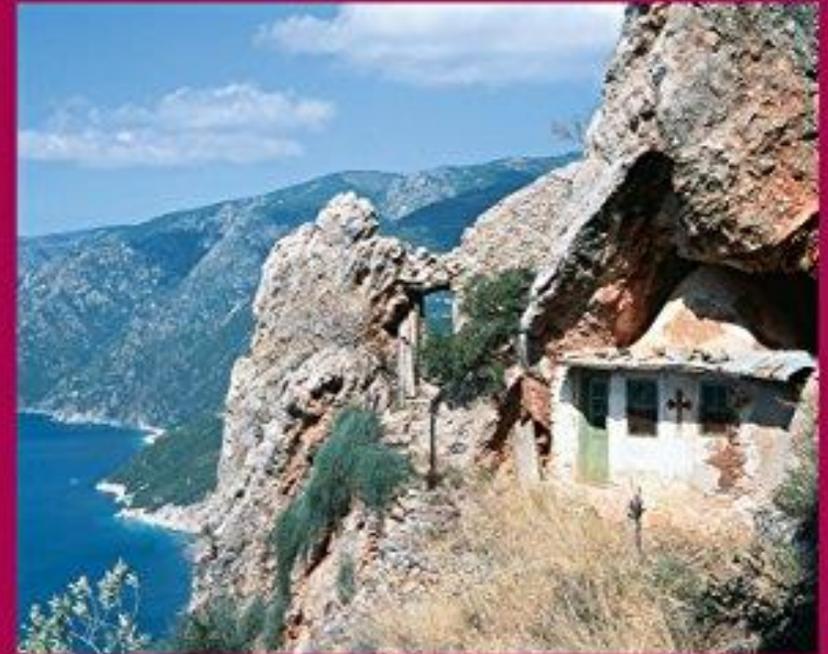
Saint John of Sinai writes:

“Hesychasm is the enclosing of the bodiless primary cognitive faculty of the soul in the bodily house of the body.” (Eastern Orthodoxy teaches of two cognitive faculties, the *nous* [intellect] and *logos* [will].)

In solitude and retirement, the hesychast repeats the Jesus Prayer, "*Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner.*" Kyrie Eleisen: contemplation on the grace of God.

This movement occurs as the Russian Church is forming and so has a big influence there.

Monastic Wisdom



The Letters of
Elder Joseph the Hesychast

What is the theological purpose of contemplation?

- The “beatific vision” or the “blessed view” of God was the objective.
- **To see God with your mind’s eye** since He lives in the spiritual, non-physical world. John 1.18: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”
- The beatific vision refers to the transfiguration event in the gospels where Christ on Mount Tabor was shining like the sun. This is comparable to Moses on Mount Sinai. What does this tell us about this scene? The Trinity shining through the physical body of Christ.
- This is a major piece of monastery life especially in the Eastern Church and is reflected in the icons of that period. This is far distant from our thinking in the West and in Protestant theology but we must try to recapture that culture and time to understand it.



The Christian Art controversy – Iconoclasm [means “to destroy images”.]

- Why is Christian art so debated?
- The Big Ten and idolatry of the OT has to be re-interpreted in light of the coming of Christ who made God known physically. Cf. **Hebrews 1**.
- **What symbols and images of Christianity are acceptable and helpful for worship?**
- In the East it was pictures and in the West it was statues.
- In Protestant thinking [many centuries later] only circles and empty crosses were allowed, but music was okay. We can worship with our ears but not our eyes?
- In the 700's this was all hotly debated and summarized in the last [and seventh including both East and West Christianity] ecumenical council the Second Nicaean in 787. It concluded that images aid worship and are a means of grace by assisting in the contemplation of Christ.
- **The reason that the Christian Emperor Leo III decided to promote the destruction of Christian art was because Islam, which was winning most of the wars, was strongly anti-image. He thought that God was judging the Christian world because it had wrongly accepted and used images.**





A look ahead to the Reformation: Destruction of religious art in the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp in 1566, staged as a community act.

What is the difference between a hymn whose words and sounds lead to worship or a piece of Christian art that does the same? Isn't "taste" a primary form of worship in the weekly celebration of the Table?

Nach wenig Predication
Die Cahansche Religion

Das bildens furmen siengen an
Das nicht ein bilde dawon bleib stan

Kap Alons brantz, kilch, auch die altar
Und weest sonst dort vor handen war.

Zerbrochen all in kurtzer fundt
Gleich gar vil leuten das ist kundt.



Separation from the world to a disciplined life of studying Christ. Why did they interpret the force of the New Testament in this way?

The Christian Church in the year 900 looked a bit different than today. A life of contemplation was the ideal Christian life.

How should we view our brothers and sisters from this period?

Monastic Life: Benedictine Rule

- About 530, a monk named Benedict organized the monastery of Monte Cassino in central Italy.
- He created rules to regulate monastic life.
- The Benedictine Rule was used by monasteries and convents across Europe.
- Under the Benedictine Rule, monks and nuns took three vows.
 - Obedience to the abbot or abbess who headed the monastery or convent.
 - Poverty – the monk owned nothing, not even the clothes on his back
 - Chastity/purity remaining unmarried.



Monastic Life: Benedictine Rule

- Imagine a life in which you never got more than 3 hours of sleep at a time.
- You attended worship seven times a day including midnight, 3am and 6am.
- Each day was divided into periods for worship, work and study.
 - Benedict required monks to work in the fields or at other physical tasks.
 - As part of their labor monks and nuns cleared and drained land and experimented with crops.
- Because they developed better agricultural methods, they improved the agricultural economy of the Middle Ages. They also brewed beer as an important alternative to water. [Those who drank beer were more healthy than those who drank from the community well.]



Who lived in the monastery and what problems came from this approach to the Christian life?

- Those who dedicated themselves to a life of study and worship. They lived in the isolated countryside as far from temptation as they could get.
- Those who were given as children [oblates] to the monastery, sometimes as an act of faith and sometimes because the child could not be cared for.
- Those who were of retirement age. It was a safe place to live until you died. Food and shelter were not easily available in the working world and when you could no longer work you needed protection.
- Wealth came not to individual monks or nuns but came to the monastery and this temptation created undisciplined conditions.
- Reforms were attempted. Cluniac reforms in the 900's and the Cistercian reforms in the 1100's. Both only lasted for a few decades then the temptations of wealth and relaxed rules led to corruption.
- A new wave of monasteries began in the 1200's with Francis and Clare. They were not hidden in the countryside but moved into urban centers. They took a vow of poverty and begged for their food. They preached, educated, heard confessions and cared for people acting more like priests than monks. They only kept enough money for their immediate needs and refused to save or worry about the future. After a century, they too fell into temptation and were handing out light penances to attract more donations.

A Lifetime Habit

A Lifetime Habit

In the 6th century, St. Benedict formed a monastery where monks could live, work, and pray together. Benedictine monks gave up all property, promised never to marry, and pledged to obey their leaders.

Different groups of monks formed over the centuries. Each had their own rules and missions. However, their simple habits of dress and behavior are still practiced by modern day monks.

The Benedictine monks were known as the Black Monks because of the color of their clothes.



The Church and Medieval Life

- During the early Middle Ages, the Church's most important achievement was to Christianize the diverse people of Western Europe. This took about 500 years.
- In 597, Pope Gregory I sent Augustine to re-convert the Angle-Saxons in England.
- From Britain, later missionaries went back to the continent to spread their faith among Germanic tribes.
- By the late Middle Ages, Europe had become a Christian civilization, having pushed Islam back to the edges.



The Church and Medieval Life

- Women also spread the faith even at the risk of their own lives.
- Some women married pagan kings and brought their husbands into the Church.
- Queen Clothilde, for example, persuaded her husband Clovis, who was king of the Franks, to accept Christianity.



The Role of Parish Priest

- Christian rituals and faith were part of a fabric of everyday's life.
- In villages, the priest of the parish, or local region, was often the only contact people had with the Church.
- He was probably the only person who could read or write.
- The priest celebrated the mass and administered the sacraments, which totaled seven, the means of grace.
- *Ex opere operato*: Christians believed that participation in the sacraments would lead them to salvation and heaven.



Europe was slowly being converted to Christianity. Missionaries came from Ireland and Italy [those were not countries at all in those days].

Eastern Europe and Scandinavia remained polytheistic until the 11th century.



St. Willibrord and the Frisians

Example: The challenge of communicating the Gospel.

St. Willibrord worked among the Frisian tribes [today would today be the Netherlands] in 8th century. He convinced the king of the Frisians to become a Christian and to be baptized. Baptism [the Bath] carried heavy weight as the mark of being Christian as it does in most non-Christian cultures.

As he stepped into the fountain for baptism, he asked Willibrord if he would see his forefathers in heaven. Willibrord explained that, no - his relatives would be in hell and not in heaven because they did not know Christ. The king then stepped out of the water and refused saying that he would rather die a pagan and see his family in hell than to be separated from them forever.

The Frisians were not Christianized for another hundred years until they were conquered in battle by Charlemagne's forces.

