

Year at a Glance	
Nov 9-Dec 14	Early Church Age
Jan 4-Feb 8	Post-Nicene Age
Feb 15-Mar 22	Medieval Age
Mar 29-May 10	Reformation Age
May 17-May 31	Great Awakening to Today

Medieval Age	
February 8 - March 22	
Date	Topic & Reading
Feb 15	“Gregory the Great” (chapter 17) “Charlemagne and Christendom” (chapter 18)
Feb 22	“The Papacy and the Crusader” (chapter 19)
Mar 1	MISSIONS SUNDAY
Mar 8	“Scholasticism” (chapter 20) “The Monastic Ideal” (chapter 21)
Mar 15	“The Decline of the Papacy” (chapter 22)
Mar 22	“Wyclif and Hus” (chapter 23)

Last week we surveyed **scholasticism** and the “**back to poverty**” movements of the Middle Ages. We began by asking several important questions: What role should reason play in theology? **How much can be known about God through philosophy or logic, and where must Scripture speak with final authority?** The scholastics attempted to show the reasonableness of Christian doctrine and to arrange the teachings of the church into a careful and systematic structure. We looked particularly at figures such as **Anselm, Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas**. Their work treated theology as the “queen of the sciences” and produced what David Calhoun calls a kind of “cathedral of the mind”—a vast and detailed intellectual system. At the same time, scholastic theology could become overly technical and abstract, sometimes drifting away from the practical life and pastoral needs of the church.

We didn’t have time to consider how scholastic thought shaped medieval teaching about the Lord’s Supper, especially through the doctrine of **transubstantiation** and Aristotle’s distinction between “**substance**” and “**accidents**” (see the notes). This leads us to reflect on a continuing question for the church: how do we appreciate careful thinking and intellectual engagement while *guarding against allowing human philosophy to overshadow the authority of Scripture?*

In the second half of the lesson we moved from the universities to the reform movements that called the church back to simplicity, poverty, and the **authority of Scripture**. We examined **Peter Waldo and the Waldensians**, who emphasized Bible translation, lay preaching, Scripture memory, and a life of humble obedience to Christ. We also briefly discussed groups such as the **Bogomils** and **Albigensians**, the rise of the **Dominican** order, and the development of the Inquisition. We also introduced the life of **Francis of Assisi**, though we did not reach all of the material, including the well-known story of the **wolf of Gubbio**.

The reading for today was “The Sleeping Men and the Law of Necessity (Decline of the Papacy)” (chapter 22)

## THE DECLINE OF THE PAPACY: QUESTIONING THE FOUNDATIONS<sup>1</sup>

*“This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” Mark 7:6–8*

**By the fourteenth century, a series of political, social, and intellectual crises began to weaken the authority of the medieval papacy and prepared the way for the reform movements that would follow.**

### Getting Our Minds around the 14<sup>th</sup> Century

#### Timeline of the Crises

- 1300 — Boniface VIII claims supreme papal authority
- 1303 — Boniface VIII humiliated at Anagni [*ah-NAHN-ye*]
- 1309–1377 — Avignon [*ah-veen-YON*] Papacy (“Babylonian Captivity”)
- 1378–1417 — The Great Schism (and the Council of Constance)
- 1320s–1340s — Ockham challenges papal authority

#### Five Words to Remember the 14th Century

**Famine → Plague → Kings → Popes → Thinkers**

### I. Crisis of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century

#### A. The Great Famine

- i. From 1315–1317 unusually heavy rains ruined crops across much of northern Europe.
- ii. The resulting famine caused widespread starvation and may have killed roughly **10% of the population in some regions.**
- iii. The famine revealed that Europe had reached the limits of what medieval agriculture could support. Population growth had strained food supplies, and living conditions for many people were already deteriorating.

#### B. The Black Death (1347)

- i. Bubonic plague transmitted primarily through fleas carried by rats
  - a) Originated in Asia
  - b) Reached Sicily in October 1347 on trading ships, illustrating the growing interconnectedness of the medieval world economy

<sup>1</sup> These notes are based on the February 8, 2008 lesson from Bill Payne.

- ii. First major plague in Europe since the Plague of Justinian (6th–7th centuries)
- iii. Extremely high mortality rate

Estimates suggest **25–50% of Europe's population died between 1347 and 1351** (roughly 19–38 million people)

iv. Impact

- a) Some responded by living for the moment (drinking, sexual immorality, reckless living)
- b) Large losses among clergy - Many priests died while caring for the sick (estimates suggest as many as **one-third of clergy** perished)
- c) Attempts to explain the disaster

- Some viewed it as the **judgment of God**
- Others attributed it to **demonic activity or supernatural forces**
- **Flagellant** movements arose, practicing public self-punishment in an effort to obtain God's mercy (condemned by Pope Clement VI in 1349)
- Some blamed Jewish communities, resulting in violent **pogroms**<sup>2</sup>
- Pilgrimages to shrines and veneration of relics increased
- Many believed the **end of the world** was near



- d) A widespread **fascination with death** developed (reflected in **art and literature** such as the “Dance of Death”)
- e) **Intellectual uncertainty** grew as people questioned the ability of traditional explanations to account for such catastrophe



- f) Economic and social disruption - Labor shortages destabilized the economy and contributed to **peasant revolts and social unrest**

<sup>2</sup> A pogrom is a violent mob attack against a minority group, especially Jews, involving killing, destruction, and forced expulsion.

### C. Hundred Years' War

#### i. Cause of the war

**England** ruled the region of Gascony but technically held it as a fief under the French crown. When **Edward III of England refused homage to Philip VI of France in 1337**, the French king confiscated Gascony. England responded by declaring war, beginning the Hundred Years' War.

#### ii. The war changed the nature of warfare and weakened the feudal system

- Large numbers of **common foot soldiers**, especially English longbowmen, proved capable of defeating mounted knights.
- The growing use of **gunpowder and artillery**, especially toward the end of the war, reduced the military importance of castles and feudal knights.

#### iii. These developments weakened the traditional **feudal military structure** and strengthened centralized national governments.

#### iv. Joan of Arc

- a) A young French peasant who reported experiencing **visions** and believed God had called her to help save France.
- b) Her leadership and courage inspired French troops and helped turn the tide of the war in France's favor.
- c) Captured in 1430 by Burgundian forces allied with England and handed over to the English. She was tried by an English-controlled church court for heresy and burned at the stake in 1431 at the age of 19.
- d) In 1456 a church court ordered a retrial and declared her innocent of the charges.
- e) In 1920 she was canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church.

#### i. Impact of the Hundred Years' War

##### a) Strengthened central governments and emerging nationalism

- People increasingly identified themselves with their kingdoms and nations rather than with the universal authority of the medieval church.
- The traditional feudal system weakened as **professional armies and paid soldiers** replaced feudal military obligations between lords and vassals.

- b) The papacy's residence in Avignon [*ah-veen-YON*] under strong French influence caused many in England to view the papacy as politically aligned with France.
- c) Political rivalries and alliances formed during the war helped prepare the way for later divisions in the church, particularly when different nations supported **different popes during the Great Schism.**

#### D. Problems with Church Bureaucracy

- i. Because medieval states were often weak and lacked developed legal systems, the church frequently served as the primary institution for handling legal transactions and resolving disputes.
- ii. Many cases could be appealed to Rome, but the process was slow, complicated, and expensive.
- iii. The complexity of this system created many opportunities for abuse and corruption within the church administration.

#### E. The Rise of Towns and the Merchant and Banking Class

- i. Towns grew as commerce expanded and long-distance trade increased.
- ii. Urban life was increasingly dominated by wealthy merchants, guild masters, and property owners.
- iii. The rise of towns challenged the feudal system.
  - a) Town charters created independence from feudal control.  
Many towns purchased charters from kings that granted them freedoms such as self-government and exemptions from certain feudal obligations and taxes.
  - b) Towns provided a path to freedom for serfs.  
Serfs who escaped to towns and lived there for a set period (often summarized as "a year and a day") could become legally free.
  - c) Towns became centers of education and intellectual life.  
Cities were home to cathedral schools and universities, which became important centers of learning in medieval Europe.
  - d) Towns often allied with kings to resist the power of nobles and church authorities.  
Urban communities frequently sought protection from kings in order to limit the political and economic control of local feudal lords and sometimes church officials.

- iv. Powerful banking families, such as [the Fuggers of Germany](#), helped finance rulers and even the papacy.
- v. The growing wealth and independence of Italian cities would help give birth to the Renaissance.

## II. Challenges to the Papacy

### A. Boniface VIII

#### i. A powerful example of the “imperial papacy”

Boniface VIII continued the high view of papal authority associated with popes like **Pope Innocent III**, believing the pope had authority even over kings.

- a) He used the institutional power of the papacy to challenge and pressure secular rulers.
- b) He embraced the symbolism of papal supremacy. Tradition reports him declaring, “**I am Caesar, I am emperor,**” reflecting his belief in papal authority over earthly rulers.
- c) He excelled in the ceremonial splendor and political theater of the medieval papal court.
- d) His rise to the papacy was controversial. After **Pope Celestine V** unexpectedly resigned, critics—especially members of the **Colonna family** and some **Franciscans**—claimed Celestine had been pressured to step down so Boniface could take the throne.

#### ii. The Jubilee of 1300

Boniface proclaimed the first major **Holy Year (Jubilee)**, *promising a full pardon for pilgrims who traveled to Rome* and visited its principal churches.

### B. Boniface VIII and the showdown with Edward I of England and Philip IV of France

- i. The rise of stronger centralized monarchies increased the need for taxation.
  - a) Kings increasingly relied on paid professional armies rather than feudal military obligations.
  - b) Governments also needed revenue for administration and the protection of trade routes.
- ii. Both Edward I of England and Philip IV of France attempted to tax church property.

- iii. Boniface responded by issuing the bull *Clericis Laicos* (1296), threatening excommunication for any ruler who taxed the clergy and any cleric who paid such taxes.
- iv. Royal responses
  - a) Edward I withdrew royal protection from clergy who refused to pay taxes, leaving them vulnerable to secular legal action.
  - b) Philip IV retaliated by placing an embargo on the export of gold, silver, and jewels from France, cutting off papal revenue.
- v. Facing political and financial pressure, Boniface was forced to compromise.

### C. The showdown with Philip IV

- i. Philip rejected the pope's claims of authority over temporal rulers.
- ii. In 1301 Philip arrested a French bishop. Boniface demanded his release.
  - a) Boniface again forbade the payment of taxes to the French crown.
  - b) Philip responded by calling the Estates General, seeking national support against the pope.
- iii. The conflict between royal and papal authority intensified.
  - a) Boniface issued the papal bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302)
    - declared that the church is necessary for salvation
    - affirmed the pope as the supreme head of the church
    - concluded that submission to the Roman pontiff is necessary for salvation
  - b) Philip attempted to remove Boniface by accusing him of heresy, simony, and immorality.
  - c) The Incident at Anagni [*ah-NAHN-yee*] (1303)
    - Philip's advisor Guillaume de Nogaret led troops to Boniface's residence at Anagni.
    - The pope was confronted, threatened, and briefly held captive.

- Local townspeople eventually freed him, but the event severely damaged papal prestige.

d) Boniface returned to Rome but died shortly afterward.

iv. Impact

- a) Strengthened the authority of national monarchs within their own territories.
- b) Significantly weakened respect for the papacy.

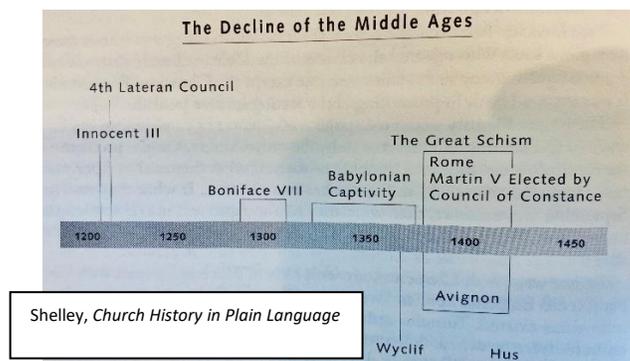
**B. The Babylonian Captivity** (Avignon [ah-veen-YON] Papacy)

i. In 1305 a Frenchman, Clement V, was elected pope.

- a) Under strong pressure from the French crown, he never returned to Rome and established the papal residence at Avignon.
- b) Because the pope now resided in France, many European nations began to view the papacy as politically controlled by the French monarchy.
- c) In 1324 the Holy Roman Emperor Louis IV challenged papal authority, and some thinkers began promoting the idea of Conciliarism — the view that the church should ultimately be governed by a general council rather than the pope alone.

ii. Methods of raising papal revenue created widespread resentment.

- a) The move to Avignon and the growing papal administration increased financial pressures on the papacy.
- b) **Annates** [AN-its] — the first year's income of newly appointed bishops or church officials was paid to the papacy.
- c) The increased sale of **indulgences** became an important source of revenue.
- d) Threats of **excommunication** were sometimes used to enforce financial demands.
- e) **Annates** taxed church leaders, **indulgences** reduced punishment (for payment), and **benefices** provided income — and together they made many people feel the church cared more about money than ministry.



### III. The Avignon Popes

<a href="#">Pope Clement V: 1305–1314</a>	<a href="#">Pope John XXII: 1316–1334</a>	<a href="#">Pope Benedict XII: 1334–1342</a>	<a href="#">Pope Clement VI: 1342–1352</a>	<a href="#">Pope Innocent VI: 1352–1362</a>	<a href="#">Pope Urban V: 1362–1370</a>	<a href="#">Pope Gregory XI: 1370–1378</a>
Did not visit Rome once and appointed French Cardinals. Undid many of the reforms of Boniface. Did not defend Templars. Moved residence to Avignon.	Elected at 72 and lived longer than expected. Wanted to exert power in Rome and created system of ecclesiastical taxes to raise money.	Promised to move back to Rome but built large palace at Avignon. Put the power of the Papacy at the disposal of the French during 100 Years War.	Tried to mediate between French and British but British saw him as ally of the French. Created pomp and luxury in the Papal court.	Made arrangements to return to Rome but died before executing them.	Led an austere and disciplined life. He tried to reform the court at Avignon. He returned to Rome but could not gain loyalty there and returned to France.	Call by Catherine of Siena for the Pope to return to Rome. Returned to Rome in 1377. Difficulties caused him to consider a return to Avignon but died before trip could be made.

#### A. The Great Schism

- i. In 1378 the mostly French College of Cardinals, under pressure from the Roman population, elected an Italian pope, **Urban VI**.
  - a) Urban quickly attempted to reform abuses in the church (leaders were forbidden to accept gifts and bishops were required to live in their dioceses).
  - b) He also began appointing Italian cardinals and relatives to positions of influence.
  
- ii. Many cardinals soon rejected Urban, declared his election invalid, and elected a rival pope, **Clement VII**.
  - a) Supporters of Clement attempted to attack Urban in Rome but failed.
  - b) Clement withdrew to Avignon and established a rival papal court.
  
- iii. **Europe was now divided between two papacies.**
  - a) Some nations supported the Roman pope, while others supported the Avignon pope.
  - b) In some regions tensions and even violence arose as different groups followed different popes.
  
- iv. In 1409 a general council met at Pisa to resolve the crisis.

Instead of solving the problem, the council elected a **third pope**, resulting in three competing popes (sometimes called the “cursed trinity”).

- v. The Council of Constance (1414)
  - a) The Holy Roman Emperor called a council at Constance in Germany to resolve the crisis.
  - b) Voting was organized by nations, with each nation receiving one vote.
  - c) By 1417 one pope had resigned and two were deposed.
  - d) The council elected **Martin V** as the sole pope.
  
- vi. Temporary triumph of **Conciliarism**
  - a) The council declared that general councils should meet periodically to govern the church.
  
- vii. **Martin V later rejected this principle and refused to allow councils to exercise authority above the papacy.**

Years of intrigue, infighting, and corruption had taken their toll on the papacy and the church. The Italian poet Boccaccio told a story about a Jew who came to Rome and embraced Christianity on the basis that any religion that could survive such iniquities of its leaders must be the true faith. If Christianity could still exist after all of this, there is something amazing about it (Calhoun).

#### IV. Intellectual Challenges

##### A. **William of Ockham** and the Via Moderna (“Modern Way”)

- i. Summoned to Avignon in 1324 to answer charges of heresy connected to the Franciscan poverty controversy.
 

Some Franciscans argued that Christ and the apostles owned nothing, and therefore the church should live in poverty. When the pope rejected this idea, the controversy raised an uncomfortable question: had the church become too wealthy to follow the example of Christ?
- ii. After examining papal policies, Ockham concluded that the pope’s actions contradicted the Gospel and fled Avignon, eventually finding protection with the Holy Roman Emperor.
- iii. Ockham challenged the “moderate realism” taught by Aquinas and Scotus.
  - a) Nominalism — universals are not real entities but only names used by humans to describe groups of things.

- b) Human beings create categories to understand the world, but those categories do not exist independently in reality.
  - c) This thinking contributed to a sharper distinction between what can be known by **natural reason** and what must be known through **divine revelation**.
  - d) It moved intellectual life toward a **separation** between philosophy and theology (think: Tertullian: “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?”).
    - Aquinas had taught that the truths of philosophy and theology ultimately agree because all truth comes from God.
- iv. **Ockham’s Razor** — “entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.”

Ockham’s Razor means that when two explanations are possible, the simpler one that requires fewer assumptions is usually the better explanation.

“If you hear hoofbeats outside, you should think horses, not zebras.”

Ockham helped weaken the scholastic philosophical system that supported medieval theology (*e.g.*, Aristotle’s teaching of substance and accidents as a support for transubstantiation), and as that framework lost credibility, reformers began asking whether many church doctrines were truly grounded in Scripture, leading them back to the authority of the Bible.

Ockham did not necessarily reject the idea of substance and accidents, but he was deeply skeptical of the elaborate Aristotelian philosophical system that scholastic theologians used to explain theology.

The **Reformers themselves did not reject the idea that something like substance exists**, but they strongly rejected the **Aristotelian explanation used to defend transubstantiation**.

For example **Martin Luther** said: “Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light.”

#### B. **Dante** (Early Renaissance Thought)

- i. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) was an Italian poet from Florence and one of the greatest literary figures of the Middle Ages. Author of *The Divine Comedy* (completed 1321) and *On Monarchy*.
- ii. His most famous work, ***Divine Comedy***, is an epic poem describing a symbolic journey through the afterlife: *Inferno* (hell), *Purgatorio* (purgatory), and *Paradiso* (heaven). Guided first by the Roman poet Virgil and later by Beatrice, Dante travels through these realms, encountering historical figures, political leaders, and even church officials who are judged according to their lives. The poem combines theology, philosophy, and political commentary, and **it is famous for its sharp criticism of corruption in the medieval church, including several popes whom Dante places in hell**. Written in Italian rather than Latin, the *Divine Comedy* helped shape the Italian language and reflects the growing intellectual and cultural changes that were beginning to challenge the medieval world.

- iii. Dante argued that the pope and the emperor each receive authority from God but govern different spheres.
  - a) The church should guide spiritual matters.
  - b) Civil rulers should govern temporal affairs.
  - c) The church should not function as a political state with taxes and armies.
- iv. By the time of Dante (200 years before the Reformation), criticism of the papacy had become so widespread that the most famous poet in Europe could place corrupt popes in hell and still be celebrated as a Christian writer.

By the early 1400s the authority of the papacy had been deeply weakened. Political rulers resisted it, intellectuals questioned it, and even church councils challenged it. The stage was now set for reformers who would ask a deeper question: **not merely how the church should be governed, but what authority should govern the church: the papacy—or Scripture.**

**Homework for March 22:** Read “Wyclif and Hus” (chapter 23)

APPENDIX 1



## APPENDIX 2

**UNAM SANCTAM (Promulgated November 18, 1302)**

Urged by faith, we are obliged to believe and to maintain that the Church is one, holy, catholic, and also apostolic. We believe in her firmly and we confess with simplicity that **outside of her there is neither salvation nor the remission of sins**, as the Spouse in the Canticles [Sgs 6:8] proclaims: 'One is my dove, my perfect one. She is the only one, the chosen of her who bore her,' and she represents one sole mystical body whose Head is Christ and the head of Christ is God [1 Cor 11:3]. In her then is one Lord, one faith, one baptism [Eph 4:5]. There had been at the time of the deluge only one ark of Noah, prefiguring the one Church, which ark, having been finished to a single cubit, had only one pilot and guide, i.e., Noah, and we read that, outside of this ark, all that subsisted on the earth was destroyed.

We venerate this Church as one, the Lord having said by the mouth of the prophet: 'Deliver, O God, my soul from the sword and my only one from the hand of the dog.' [Ps 21:20] He has prayed for his soul, that is for himself, heart and body; and this body, that is to say, the Church, He has called one because of the unity of the Spouse, of the faith, of the sacraments, and of the charity of the Church. This is the tunic of the Lord, the seamless tunic, which was not rent but which was cast by lot [Jn 19:23-24]. Therefore, of the one and only Church there is one body and one head, not two heads like a monster; that is, Christ and the Vicar of Christ, Peter and the successor of Peter, since the Lord speaking to Peter Himself said: 'Feed my sheep' [Jn 21:17], meaning, my sheep in general, not these, nor those in particular, whence we understand that He entrusted all to him [Peter]. Therefore, if the Greeks or others should say that they are not confided to Peter and to his successors, they must confess not being the sheep of Christ, since Our Lord says in John 'there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.' We are informed by the texts of the gospels that in this Church and in its power are two swords; namely, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the Apostles say: 'Behold, here are two swords' [Lk 22:38] that is to say, in the Church, since the Apostles were speaking, the Lord did not reply that there were too many, but sufficient. Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: 'Put up thy sword into thy scabbard' [Mt 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the former is to be administered for the Church but the latter by the Church; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest.

However, one sword ought to be subordinated to the other and temporal authority, subjected to spiritual power. For since the Apostle said: 'There is no power except from God and the things that are, are ordained of God' [Rom 13:1-2], but they would not be ordained if one sword were not subordinated to the other and if the inferior one, as it were, were not led upwards by the other.

For, according to the Blessed Dionysius, it is a law of the divinity that the lowest things reach the highest place by intermediaries. Then, according to the order of the universe, all things are not led back to order equally and immediately, but the lowest by the intermediary, and the inferior by the superior. Hence we must recognize the more clearly that spiritual power surpasses in dignity and in nobility any temporal power whatever, as spiritual things surpass the temporal. This we see very clearly also by the payment, benediction, and consecration of the tithes, but the acceptance of power itself and by the government even of things. For with truth as our witness, it belongs to

spiritual power to establish the terrestrial power and to pass judgement if it has not been good. Thus is accomplished the prophecy of Jeremias concerning the Church and the ecclesiastical power: 'Behold to-day I have placed you over nations, and over kingdoms' and the rest. Therefore, if the terrestrial power err, it will be judged by the spiritual power; but if a minor spiritual power err, it will be judged by a superior spiritual power; but if the highest power of all err, it can be judged only by God, and not by man, according to the testimony of the Apostle: 'The spiritual man judgeth of all things and he himself is judged by no man' [1 Cor 2:15]. This authority, however, (though it has been given to man and is exercised by man), is not human but rather divine, granted to Peter by a divine word and reaffirmed to him (Peter) and his successors by the One Whom Peter confessed, the Lord saying to Peter himself, 'Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in Heaven' etc., [Mt 16:19]. Therefore whoever resists this power thus ordained by God, resists the ordinance of God [Rom 13:2], unless he invent like Manicheus two beginnings, which is false and judged by us heretical, since according to the testimony of Moses, it is not in the beginnings but in the beginning that God created heaven and earth [Gen 1:1]. Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.