

I. Medieval Christianity - From Christianity to Christendom

A. Christendom:

1. Membership in society meant membership in church by means of infant baptism.
2. Intermingling of functions of Church and State
  - a. King was expected to use the power of the state to weed out heresy. Heresy became crime against state as well as spiritual failure. In case of Albigensian crusade, military troops marshaled against heretics with promise ruler could have heretics' properties.
  - b. Kings competed with pope over right to appoint bishops (investiture controversy)
  - c. Bishops were also often lords connected to a ruler.
  - d. Charlesmagne crowned first Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day 800

B. Popular Religion in the Cycles of Medieval Life

1. Christian calendar
  - a. Holy days formed around previous pagan holidays.
    - 1) Easter – in Spring with emphasis on eggs and rabbits, reminiscent of fertility goddess Eostre
    - 2) Lent – 40 day period of fasting preceding Easter, Ash Wednesday – first Wednesday marking beginning of Lenten season; Fat Tuesday (Shrove Tuesday, Mardi Gras)
    - 3) Advent – 40 days before Christmas.
    - 4) Christmas – birthday of the sun god (Winter solstice).
  - b. Patron saints – each given observance day associated with professions (such as Apollinia, the saint of dentists). Relics.
2. Social and Spiritual influences
  - a. Physical environment influenced life and seen as evidence of God's judgment or blessing. Mix of natural world with supernatural.

- b. Religious rituals were social events – infant baptism, confirmation, communion, marriage (other Sacraments – ordination, penance, late rites).
  - c. Sin & heresy – acts that threaten the entire community. Therefore, judgement and eradication was also public.
    - 1) Trial by ordeal
    - 2) Inquisition
  - d. Early medieval religious emphasis – shame not sin; atonement not repentance; orthopraxy not orthodoxy. Suffering is result of divine displeasure or divine revenge. Divine punishment is for human interference with order rather than moral offence (J. Nelson, 67-69).
- II. Heresy – occurred after 1000s.
- A. Viewed as an infectious disease that could corrupt the rest of the church.
  - B. Seen as a political crime (treason) as well as a religious failing.
  - C. Social changes that gave rise to increase of heresy:
    - 1. Demographic growth and technological improvements caused social pressures resulting in less close-knit communities
    - 2. Loss of independent status of women in affluent families as result of shift from cognatic inheritance (through women) to agnatic inheritance (through sons). But many women who maintained independence (by inheriting their father's property) and authority of their clans were also implicated in Cathar heresy.
    - 3. New individual avenues for advancement through clerical education or military.
    - 4. Weakened monarchies and stronger lords giving rise to feudalism and oppression of the poor.
    - 5. Increased mobility through trade, pilgrimage, and crusades causing contact among different people and sharing of different ideas.
  - D. Heresy was seen as a deliberate rejection of established religious doctrines, practices, or authority. Two types of heresy:

1. Not new belief system, but new lifestyle (meeting in conventicles, independent customs – Bettenson, p. 147)
  2. Sectarian groups focusing on purity which rejected existing corrupt religious institutions (Cathars).
  3. Instigators of heresy were often monks, clerks, and hermits in areas where religious structures were particularly oppressive (Templars, Cistercian, later Franciscans).
- E. Fourth Lateran Council's guidelines for dealing with heretics (1215 AD):
1. Heretic to be punished by secular ruler
  2. Property of heretic to be confiscated
  3. Secular lord who didn't weed out heresy was to be excommunicated
  4. Secular lord who failed to punish heretics would have his vassals released from their oath to follow him and the lord's lands would be confiscated.
  5. Bishop or his representative was to visit parishes once a year, 3 or more men would swear to report heretics who were to be brought before bishop to clear themselves.
  6. Pope Innocent III established inquisition – legal tribunal staffed with experts designed as systematic means of searching out and reconciling heretics.
  7. Dominicans became primary inquisitors – traveled in pairs, preached sermons first, gave season for heretics to confess during period of grace. Accusers of heretics could do so anonymously. After 1252, torture used by inquisitors (Barber, 191).
- F. Thomas Aquinas' justification of the Inquisition
1. Heretics deserve excommunication and execution. Seen as greater sin than forgery.
  2. Church should show mercy at first – two warnings and attempts to correct heretics' error. If heretic refuses correction – excommunicate and give to secular ruler to be executed.

G. Women and heresy/witchcraft

1. Based on misogynist views of women as demonstrated in *Malleus Maleficarum*:
  - a. Women feebler in mind, carnal, defect in first woman made from bent rib, deceptive, lacking in faith, angry and impatient, emotional, vengeful, weak memory, undisciplined.
  - b. Explains etymology of word for woman = *femina* as *fe* = faith; *minus* = less/lacking. (Note: This is proof texting and incorrect. Actually *femina* comes from verb *feo*, meaning fruitful or to produce life).
2. Women charged with heresy/witchcraft were often independent or failed to fit standard social roles. Joan of Arc - political

Further Reading:

- Barber, Malcolm. *The Two Cities*. London: Routledge, 1992, 1997, 180-192.
- Bettenson, Henry and Chris Maunder, editors. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1998, 146-148.
- Brooke, Rosalind and Christopher. *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1984.
- Nelson, Janet. "Society, Theodicy, and The Origins of Heresy: Towards a Reassessment of the Medieval Evidence" in Derek Baker, ed., *Schism, heresy and religious protest; papers read at the tenth summer meeting and the eleventh winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, 65-77.
- Spickard, Paul A. and Kevin M. Cragg. *A Global History of Christians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: 1994, repr. 2003, 71-84, 88-98.
- Van Vorst, Robert E., Compiler. *Readings in Christianity, Second Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishers, 2001, 124-125.