

Forward in Christ: At the Dawn of the Second Millennium

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[An Essay in Celebration of God's Grace upon the 150th Anniversary of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod]

*Midway along the journey of our life
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
for I had wandered off from the straight path.
How hard it is to tell what it was like,
this wood of wilderness, savage and stubborn
(the thought of it brings back all my old fears),
a bitter place! Death could scarce be bitterer.
But if I would show the good that came of it
I must talk about things other than the good.*

-- Dante, *Inferno* (Canto I)¹

Midway through the journey of her New Testament life, the visible church of the risen Lord Jesus Christ was, from a human point of view, a church that had lost its way. The preeminent poet of the Middle Ages may have written of an imaginary journey in his opening words of *The Divine Comedy*, yet these words find an easy parallel in the actual life of the medieval church. At the dawn of the second millennium, it appeared to human eyes (and concerned hearts) that the church had wandered from the straight path laid out by her Lord, bringing spiritual darkness and confusion as bitter as death. At the dawn of the second millennium the light of truth was not shining brightly.

But it is important for us to note that it still was shining. Even on the most overcast of days, the sun still shines and its light penetrates the dark clouds. So it is with the gospel. Though the kings of the earth take their stand, though rulers and appointed leaders in the visible church gather together against the Lord's Anointed, he still remains firmly established on Zion's holy hill (Ps. 2).

The time frame for our essay is roughly 900-1200 AD; more specifically, the rise of the Cluny reform movement (c.910) to the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) during the pontificate of Innocent III. The choice of dates is arbitrary. However, this particular three-hundred year span provides us a good opportunity to witness again the essence of history: man's stubborn assertion of himself and our faithful God responding in judgment and grace.² Yes, the events which transpired in this period will force us to talk about things other than the good. But, ultimately, there is good to talk about that comes from it all. For this time frame also permits us to see that though the visible church was often searching for direction, the Lord of the Church was steadily charting the course and moving her forward, giving us the assurance that Christ is powerfully present in his world, controlling all things for our good and his glory.

Backward

¹ *The Divine Comedy, Vol. I: Inferno* trans. by M. Musa, Penguin Classics ed. (Indiana Univ. Press, 1971)

² A definition provided by Prof E. C. Fredrich in his essay *God's Governance in Grace and Judgment in Man's History* available at the Seminary on-line essay file at www.wels.net/wls/library/Essays. More precisely the quote reads: "For all nineteen centuries that have passed since the last Bible page was written God has woven history's pattern with the wasp of his grace crossed by the woof of his judgment."

First, though, let us briefly direct our attention backward a few centuries to events that preceded the dawn of the second millennium, to better understand the big picture. In the East, the Council of Chalcedon (451) had established only a superficial unity, and many religious factions remained as various groups struggled to comprehend the person of Christ. Their arguments infiltrated even the most secular affairs of everyday life.³ Theologically the Eastern church drifted more and more into philosophy and mysticism. Politically, the Byzantine Empire began to show signs of decay. One bright spot, however, was the reign of Justinian (527-565), who sought to embody the Eastern ideal: ruler of the church-state, the visible kingdom of God on earth.⁴ Christ reigns in heaven, and the emperor on earth, a reflection of the divine order. To attain the Eastern ideal, Justinian not only codified old Roman law for the empire, but also restored glory to the heart of Byzantine worship by refurbishing the Hagia Sophia.

Justinian's noble efforts, though, would not usher in the peaceable kingdom. In the years and centuries after his death, relations with the West continued to break down. Internally, new theological problems surfaced in the forms of the 7th century Monotheletic Controversy ("one-will") and the Iconoclast Controversy (725-842), the latter over what role religious symbols (especially icons) ought to play in the life of the orthodox Christian.⁵ Between the Iconoclast Controversy and the separation from the West in 1054, the Photian Schism (mid-800's), essentially a struggle for supremacy between the popes of Rome and patriarchs of Constantinople, left the empire even further divided, a precarious situation in view of the continually rising tide of Islam in the Mediterranean world.

Looking south of Byzantium, the rise of Islam literally forced three of the five ancient episcopal sees of prominence – Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria – into relative obscurity. Yet throughout periods of persecution and peace Christianity would retain a foothold in the heart of Moslem lands. The Coptic Church, believed to have been established by St. Mark himself, survived, as did her sister church further south in Ethiopia. In Syria, the Jacobite⁶ Church flourished and spread to Persia, but throughout the period up to 900 did little theologically. The Armenian Church, which did not participate in Chalcedon, found itself at odds with Western concepts of Christology and the decisions of the council, and soon was isolated. It too had little theological activity, except for an occasional attempt at reconciliation with the Byzantine Church.⁷ All these churches were not only isolated from the mainstream of Christianity by locale and language; they each had adopted a monophysite brand of theology condemned by Chalcedon.⁸

³ Some of the factions: Phthartolaters ("corruptible") - overemphasized the human nature; Aphthartolaters ("incorruptible") - emphasized divine nature to the point of docetism; Agnoetai ("ignorant") - denied the omniscience of Jesus; Aktistai ("Non-creature worshippers") - Monophysites who asserted that Jesus was not a 'creature'; and others. During Justinian's reign the Christological controversies were even carried into the hippodrome, where the "Blues" would race (and sometimes riot with) the "Greens," each party holding to differing Christological beliefs. On this last point cf. Kallistos Ware's essay, "Eastern Christianity" in John McManners, ed., (Hereafter McManners, ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992) p. 137

⁴ In the church of San Vitale, Ravenna, which Justinian had built, the shimmering mosaics still reveal the Eastern mindset: Christ sits enthroned as *pantocrator* at the front of the church. On the side wall, however, Justinian leads a procession side by side with Archbishop Maximian. Justinian is the central figure, though, and the retinue of the twelve companions surrounding him is obviously symbolic, according to Janson, of Christ and his disciples. See H.W. Janson's *History of Art*, 3rd ed. (New York: Prentice-Hall, Abrams 1986), p.218

⁵ See J. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought, Vol.2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 200-202. Occurring in a number of phases, the Iconoclast Controversy brought John of Damascus to the stage, who defended the use of icons even to the point of considering them to be a means of grace. There was more at stake than the right to use religious art. As Gonzalez explains (p.200): "According to [opponents of icons], the divine nature cannot be circumscribed. Therefore if one represents the humanity of the Savior in an image it will be necessary to represent it apart from his divinity, and this would immediately lead to that division of the two natures for which Nestorianism was condemned. If, on the other hand, one claims that in representing the humanity of Christ one also represents his divinity, this would imply circumscribing his divinity, and it would lead to the confusion of the two natures for which monophysism was condemned." Christological controversies pervade the history of Eastern Christianity.

⁶ So named for its founder, Jacob Baradaeus (d.578 AD), an opponent to the decision of Chalcedon (451 AD).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The exception being an offshoot of the Coptic Church, the Melkites (lit. "of the king"), who remained loyal to Byzantium.

In the West following Chalcedon, the barbarian invasions radically changed both the lives of the people and the life of the church. In particular, the decay and destruction of the Roman world forced leaders of the church to assume major political responsibilities, no small factor in the rise of papal power.⁹

The period after Chalcedon also witnessed the appearance of what could arguably be called the most influential document of the Middle Ages, The Rule of St. Benedict (c.530). The genius of Benedict's Rule was that he developed a system for Christian living that synthesized the ideals of monastic life inherited from the East with the realities of human weakness.¹⁰ In other words, Benedict found a way for average Christians to aspire to a life of devotion to God without the extreme rigors of ascetism. The result was 'cenobitism',¹¹ and this movement, along with its various reincarnations, would be responsible for much of what was good – and much of what was bad – in medieval Europe. "If we desire to dwell in the tabernacle of his kingdom, we cannot reach it in any way, unless we run thither by good works,"¹² said the founder. Hundreds of thousands tried, and, in turn, taught millions to follow.

On the fringes of Western Christian Europe important developments were also taking place. To the north Celtic Christianity flourished, their legacy beautifully preserved for us in the Book of Kells and the Lindesfarne Gospels. Guardians of knowledge and learning, the monks of the North were responsible to a large extent for helping in the Christianization of Europe, bringing in time what they had received back to heathen of the mainland. However, they too would fall under the ever-lengthening shadow of Rome at the Synod of Whitby (664), where Celtic Christians agreed to place themselves under Roman jurisdiction and follow their liturgical year. In Spain, the Moslem presence was powerful, restricting Christians in their worship practices and life, even forcing them in places to wear marks of identification.¹³ The Moslem push northward was halted by Charles Martel in 732, and as the year 1000 approached, a last-ditch effort at Moorish domination of Spain under Al-Mansor would fail, ushering in a long period of Moslem decline in Iberia.

Also of importance in the West was the Carolingian Renaissance, instituted by Charlemagne. Though crowned by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day, 800 (an apparently spontaneous act on the part of the pope and one with which Charlemagne was not pleased, due to the symbolism inherent in pope crowning emperor¹⁴), Charlemagne worked at creating a kingdom of God on earth with the king as its visible head. He and his heirs convened religious councils and oversaw theological debates¹⁵. Through Alcuin of York Charlemagne

⁹ Marshall W. Baldwin, *The Medieval Papacy in Action* (New York: The MacMillian Co., 1940) p. 3. Baldwin states: "The collapse of stable imperial government in Italy forced bishops of Rome to assume many duties of a secular nature. It was Leo the Great (440-61), not the emperor, who went out to meet Attila the Hun; Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) practically governed Rome and negotiated with the Lombard invaders of the peninsula. Thus, although popes continued for some time to recognize the just political rights of the eastern emperors over Rome and Italy, they regarded themselves to an increasing degree as the real representatives of secular power in Rome and the territory north and south along the coast."

¹⁰ Reginald Gregoire, Leo Moulin, and Raymond Oursel. *The Monastic Realm*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. 1985), p.240: "Of all the virtues that Benedict teaches, the one to which he gives pride of place is *discretio*, 'the mother of all virtues' (C.64,48)." This is, in other words, a sense of proportion, discernment, moderation – a sense of the proper balance between what one can expect of men, and the realities of everyday life. There is nothing repressive in Benedict."

¹¹ From two Greek words, κοινος "common" and βίος "life"

¹² *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Prologue. Available at the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (hereafter, IMS)

<http://fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>. This excellent site has hundreds of public domain, primary source documents and links for the medieval period.

¹³ James Reston, Jr. *The Last Apocalypse: Europe at 1000 AD* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1998) p.116

¹⁴ Cf. Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in Christian History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997) p. 1 10, where Noll quotes Charlemagne's biographer Einhard: "It was then that he received the titles of Emperor and Augustus [Dec 25, 800], to which he at first had such an aversion that he declared that he would not have set foot in the Church the day that they were conferred, although it was a great feast-day, if he could have foreseen the design of the pope." Einhard's full history also available at IMS:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/einhard.html>

¹⁵ Most notable is the Eucharistic controversy in the days of Charles the Bald between Ratramnus and Radbertus, in which Rhabanus Maurus also became involved. The Catholic teaching of transubstantiation began to be clarified through their doctrinal repartee. Other debates were with the East over the nature of the Trinity, of the virginity of Mary, of predestination and of the *filioque*. It was this ongoing debate over the *filioque* that helped promote, indirectly, the use of the Old Roman Symbol (Apostles' Creed) in the West over the Nicene Creed. On this point see Gonzalez, *Christian Thought*, p. 107f.

promoted higher learning. Through Theodulf, bishop of Orleans, he ordered that schools be established for the rich as well as poor.¹⁶ Christian culture flourished under Charlemagne's rule, albeit too briefly, as the division of his empire following his death brought with it another period of decline.

Finally, in our brief look backward across time, in the North the pagan warriors still dominated Scandinavian lands. There had been several attempts to reach them by zealous Christian missionaries (most notably Boniface, the great missionary to the Germans), but by and large these attempts had failed and Christianity had not taken firm root in the frozen north. The Norse, the Danes, the Slavs, the Rus – each remained a people in need of hearing the gospel. And at the dawn of the second millennium, that is the direction toward which the church would turn its eyes.

Outward

Outward is where the ascending Lord directed his disciples to go, and God's people have followed that mandate down through the centuries. But what was it that brought about such a flurry of mission activity in Europe around (and after) 1000 A.D.? Was it thoughts of the end of the world? Was the night coming when no man can work (Jn 9:4)?

That does not appear to be the primary force which drove the Church to head outward to unchristian lands at the dawn of the second millennium. Some historians have tended to exaggerate the apocalyptic mindset of society around 1000 A.D., largely by reading between the lines of a history written by a monk named Rodulfus Glaber¹⁷ covering the years 900-1044 A.D. But by the late 1800's most historians began to dismiss notions of a 'world-wide panic' over the end of time in the year 1000. Granted, there were preachers who tried to fuel a panic (then as now), proclaiming that the turn of the century would usher in the seventh age of the world¹⁸. But there were also those alive then, such as Abbo of Fleury, who loudly opposed such notions, and did so on the basis of Scripture.¹⁹ So medieval scholar Bernard McGinn's assessment: "The eleventh century did not produce anything new in the history of apocalypticism, and in comparison with the following centuries it should not be singled out as an era of especially fervent hopes of the End of the world."²⁰

Rather, let us see the flowering of mission activity in this time period as one of those eras when the hearts of God's people were beautifully stirred into action, especially in the later half of the 10th century.²¹ Not that there hadn't been, of course, zealous mission efforts prior to this. Gregory I had sent Augustine to "Angle-land" in 596, who shortly thereafter established the archbishopric of Canterbury. Half-way around the world from Britain, a Nestorian missionary named A-lo-pen brought the gospel to China only thirty-nine years later (c.635), the beginnings of a Christian community that would flourish until the onset of persecution in 845. By 980, there was no trace of Nestorian Christianity in China, but its remarkable story is preserved for us in a ten-foot high monolith discovered around 1623. Composed by a Syriac priest in 781, the monolith relates Nestorian history and contains remnants of liturgical hymns.²² It still stands as a testament to the truth we profess: "God's kingdom surely comes even without our prayer."²³

¹⁶ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*. (Peabody, Mass: Prince Press, 1999), p.268. (This work was previously published in two volumes by Harper Collins, 1984.) Ironically, Charlemagne, the great promoter of education, was illiterate.

¹⁷ R. Glaber's history available at IMS. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/glaber-1000.html>

¹⁸ See Bernard McGinn's survey of apocalyptic thought, *Visions of the End* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979), p.26-27. Augustine was the first to suggest a 'six-age' (6,000 yr) scheme of history that would be followed by the 7th - the eternal kingdom of Christ.

¹⁹ Abbo of Fleury, *Apologetic Work*, quoted by McGinn, *op.cit.* p. 89

²⁰ McGinn, *op.cit.* p.88

²¹ Reston, *op.cit.* p. 7: "The forty years before the end of the first millennium is a continuous, spirited, brutal dialectic between Christianity and heathenism."

²² See the translated text of the monument at IMS: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/eastasia/781nestorian.html> Also, missionary Stephen Neill's comments in *A History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p.95

²³ Luther's explanation to the 2nd Petition

But with the prayers of zealous Christians the gospel also came to the Northlands. As was mentioned, Boniface had earlier established a Christian foothold in Germany, and later the German bishop Anskar would earn the epithet “Apostle of the North” for his work in Scandinavia. He founded the first church of Scandinavia at Bjorko, Sweden, shortly after his arrival in 830. A century and a half later, small seeds that had been planted in the North began to sprout as important leaders embraced the Christian faith: Harald Bluetooth of Denmark (974), Vladimir I of Russia (988), Olaf Trygvesson of Norway (991), Boleslav of Poland (996), Thorgeir the Lawspeaker of Iceland (1000), Leif Eriksson (1000), Olaf of Sweden (early 1000’s), Vajk (crowned as Stephen I of Hungary in 1000), Canute the Mighty of Denmark (1014). While we must concede that Christianity would take some time to become firmly rooted in these areas, as Steven Neill notes²⁴, nonetheless the public declarations for Christ on the part of these rulers did much to advance the cause of the gospel. Nor should we fail to mention the many who suffered martyrdom as the Church advanced, such as Adalbert of Prague (997) and Bruno of Querfurt (1009). As the second millennium dawned, the religious map of northern Europe was changing color. Soon Prussia would remain practically the sole bastion of paganism. It would remain so until the 13th century, when Rome commissioned the Teutonic Knights and Dominicans to settle and Christianize the region²⁵.

In the East, mission work also went forward, but without such dramatic results. Most notable are the brothers Cyril and Methodius, sent out from Constantinople by Photius in 863. They had already begun translation work on a Slavonic Bible and liturgy by the time they departed for Moravia. Due to the presence of German missionaries in the region, their efforts did not lead to the establishment of a permanent church. But their important liturgical translations would create the foundation for successful efforts later in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Russia.²⁶ St. Nikon, an Eastern monk, appeared in the 10th century and was soon dubbed “Ho Metanoeite” - the “Repent Ye!” - for his customary vovum to his listeners. He reconverted the people of Crete after the Moslem conquest, and then labored among the pagan Slavs in the southern Peloponnese.²⁷

But what ought we make of this rapid expansion of the church a thousand years ago? In evaluating the work in East and West we see both pros and cons. Positively, we can’t help but rejoice along with St. Paul that “the important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached (Php 1:18).” And Christ was preached, if only, at times, through the liturgy.

There was zeal in the West, less in the East. However, in the West the use of force was not uncommon, and it is there that we encounter many a tale that make the modern methods of the Church Growth Movement seem like child’s play. In the days of Charlemagne, Alcuin of York had advised the king that he give careful thought about how best to win the heathen for Christ. He advised a thorough study of a catechism written by St. Augustine which would hopefully lead to a willing embracing of the faith.²⁸ It was good advice, but it would not be the practice of zealous royal neophytes a century later. Most zealous among them was King Olaf Trygvesson of Norway. But rather than hearing the still small voice of the gospel (as we would hope) we hear, “Norway will be Christian or die!”²⁹ In other places too, rather than winning over unbelievers with the testimony of life and lips, we hear instead an old German couplet from the days of Otto the Great:

“And wilt thou not a Christian be,
I’ll smash thy skull, just wait and see.”³⁰

²⁴ Quoted in Noll, *op. cit.* p.99. “Neill... divided the missionary history of the Middle Ages into a five-hundred year period (500-1000) in which the main task was to draw the barbarians into the Christian orbit and a succeeding five hundred years (1000-1500) in which the great task was to turn nominally Christian Europe into genuine believers.”

²⁵ Baldwin, *Papacy*,(op.cit). p.84

²⁶ McManners, ed., *op. cit.* p. 151

²⁷ McManners, ed., *op. cit.* p.134

²⁸ McManners, ed., *op.cit.* p. 98

²⁹ Reston, *op.cit.* p. 30

³⁰ Reston, *op.cit.* p. 179

Forced baptisms and conversions *en masse* were often the rule of the day, such as when Iceland, following the decision of their “lawspeaker” (i.e. president) Thorgeir, became ‘Christian’ in a single day. Or when Eric IX of Sweden, oblivious to the linguistic and cultural differences that separated Finland from the rest of Scandinavia, carried out a major crusade against his neighbors in 1155, demanding baptism of his conquered foes.³¹ Though zealous, such efforts were often done without knowledge (Prov.19:2), leaving people who were nominally Christian but who, in reality, became syncretistic, blending new Christian ideas with old pagan beliefs. But if there was zeal in the West, there was care and cultural sensitivity in the East. For example, it was the practice of Eastern missionaries to foster liturgical worship in the native tongue³². This in contrast to the West, which strove to promote a uniform use of a Latin liturgy (though preaching in the vernacular was common, largely through the influence of the Celtic monks³³). Likewise, the East seems to have been more inclined, initially, to outreach among Muslims, if we are to judge from a specific ritual preserved for us by which Muslims could reject Islam and declare for Christ. No such rite is found in the historical record of the West.³⁴ Muslim outreach in the West was often left to individual, not ecclesiastical, effort.³⁵ Moreover, the manner in which the West dealt with Jews, Muslims, and other ethnic groups during periods of crusade and later Inquisition still serve as an important reminder to us that the law has yet to change a single heart from unbelief to faith.

Inward

Reaching the lost with the gospel of Christ, however, was not the only task that needed to be done, in the eyes of many medieval men. There was also the need for reformation and revival in the church. So our time frame also presents us with somewhat of a paradox; while the visible church was rapidly expanding outward, at the same time it was also moving ‘inward.’ That is, as the new millennium dawned there was a revival in monasticism as many sought detachment from the world, focusing their effort on the development of the inner spiritual life. Monks and mystics certainly played an important role in the history of the church; there is no denying that. But with the proliferation of monasteries and orders, with the increase of visions and ecstatic experience at the dawn of the second millennium, we might rightly ask, “Is this the direction Christians ought to have gone?”

Schwiebert once said that “no one is really qualified to write on monasticism until he has been a monk; and after he has been a monk, he can no longer write impartially on monasticism.”³⁶ This writer has never been a monk, obviously. Even so, I find it challenging to write impartially about monasticism. There is a part of me that is drawn to the image of a monk meticulously laboring in a silent *scriptorium*, illuminating a Latin manuscript that future generations will marvel at. There is a part of me that envies their intimate knowledge of the psalms and simplicity of life. And there is a part of me that honestly admits that my own level of piety pales in comparison to some of them. Yet the bigger part of me is saddened when reading their broad history, saddened to see men and women so desperately searching for, but never quite finding, the spiritual rest of which their idol Augustine spoke in his famous comment on Ps. 62.³⁷ For that reason, the Spirituals become for me almost tragic figures on the medieval stage. Monasticism was the backbone of medieval Europe, providing

³¹ Neill, *op.cit.* p.109

³² McManners, ed., *op.cit.* p. 151

³³ Reston, *op. cit.* p. 11

³⁴ McManners, ed., *op.cit.* p. 181

³⁵ St. Francis made a missionary trip to Egypt in 1216. Noll (*op.cit.*) writes about another: “Raymond Lull (b.1232) was the first Westerner to devise and carry out a full fledged mission strategy among Muslims. Lull followed his own advice that Europeans learn Arabic in order to communicate the gospel in Islamic regions. His life ended during a fourth mission trip to Muslims, when again his actions matched his words. Missionaries will convert the world by preaching, but also through the shedding of tears and blood and with great labour, and through a bitter death.” (p.101) Cf. also Neill, *op.cit.*, p. 137

³⁶ *Luther and His Times.* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 1

³⁷ “Our souls do not rest until they rest in thee.”

some measure of stability in a world filled with wars and power struggles. Yet, ironically, monasticism itself was often in flux – a movement that was, in its quest for rest, *semper reformanda*, following an almost predictable cycle of rise, riches, decay, demise.

Benedictine monasticism had fallen into decay by the year 900, and it was out of a desire for reformation that the Cluniac movement began (c.910). The importance of the French monastery of Cluny lies in this, that its charter, issued by William, Duke of Aquitaine, established a unique form of monastic government and “sparked a wave of reform which pervaded the Benedictine system and ultimately made its way into the structure of the whole church.”³⁸ What made Cluny’s charter unique was that the monastery was subject to no local bishop’s authority, but only Rome’s. Moreover, Cluny was given license to direct its own affairs under the supervision of the motherhouse. This situation, over the course of the next century, not only facilitated reform (being free of control and corruption by local bishops and lords) but did also, in turn, greatly expand the papal power base as Cluny daughtered monasteries who were loyal to Rome. Other orders, such as the Cistercians, would follow suit.

Cluny’s devotion became legendary. Abandoning the traditional Benedictine emphasis on manual labor, they focused their efforts on celebrating the Divine Office with glory and grandeur. At the height of the movement, the monks of Cluny sang 138 psalms in a single day³⁹, leaving (according to some estimates) only a half and hour of free time each day outside the walls of the chapel. They recited psalms “whether in church, kitchen, or garden, even while shaving, and this with a solemnity never before seen.”⁴⁰ Their worship heard the Athanasian Creed recited everyday.⁴¹

But zealous monks in a search of even deeper spiritual perfection would reject Cluny’s complexity and try a different, simpler path. Most famous of the “re-reformers” were the Cistercians (1098), founded at Citeaux to abide by an even stricter form of the Benedictine Rule. Others followed: Premonstratensians, Carthusians, Augustinians, Carmelites. While all these were cenobitic orders (except the later itinerant orders, the Franciscans and Dominicans, both begun near the turn of the 13th century), in the early 11th century there was also reaction in the other direction toward hermitism (the anchorites), most notably in Italy, led by Romuald of Ravenna and Peter Damian.⁴² Spiritual solitary confinement became a popular choice for some. “Sit in your cell as in Paradise; leave all memory of the world behind,”⁴³ was Romuald’s advice to his disciples. Yet isolation was not always paradise; Romuald zealously once sought solitude in a foul-smelling swamp only to eventually be driven out by the bad air. According to Damian, he reluctantly emerged from his hovel both “hairless and green as a newt.”⁴⁴

If place did not give rest to the soul, neither did monastic practice. Tertullian had originally taught that sin must render satisfaction, and monastic life abided by that tenet. Being Lutherans and knowing what spiritual *angst* the incomplete satisfaction for his sins caused Martin the monk, we honestly don’t know whether to laugh or cry when we read, for example, of the zealousness of one student of Peter Damian named Dominic Loricatus, (nicknamed “the Mailed” for the heavy coat of iron he continually wore, save for when indulging in self-flagellation – with two whips instead of one):

Of great endurance, he often did one hundred years’ penance in six days. Once during Lent he set out to do a thousand years’ penance, i.e., scourge himself through two hundred psalters, and was able to carry out his resolve before the season was over. At night he often scourged himself through nine consecutive psalters and felt disappointed at not being able to add one more psalter.

³⁸ Theodore J. Hartwig in *The Past Speaks for Itself*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986) Vol. 2, p.187. The Charter of Cluny may be found there, as well as at IMS: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/chart-cluny.html>

³⁹ Gonzalez, *Story*, p.279.

⁴⁰ Bede K. Lackner, *The Eleventh-Century Background of Citeaux*. (Washington D.C.: Consortium Press, 1972), p. 54.

⁴¹ Baldwin, *Christianity*, p.172

⁴² See Lackner, *op.cit.* p.167

⁴³ Quoted in Lackner, *op.cit.* p.169

⁴⁴ Lackner, *op. cit.* p.170

Once, however, he succeeded in scourging himself through twelve consecutive psalters and thirty-one additional psalms.⁴⁵

The mystics were also a group in search of the ultimate spiritual rest, the *visio dei*, the ‘vision of God’ himself. Smaragdus defined the contemplative life in the 800’s with his terms “compunction”⁴⁶ and “The Royal Road (*Via Regia*).”⁴⁷ While much could be said about Bernard of Clairvaux,⁴⁸ William of St. Thierry, Hugh of St. Victor, St. Simeon (in the East),⁴⁹ Elizabeth of Schonau or Gertrude the Great,⁵⁰ perhaps it is best to let one of the mystics, Hildegard von Bingen (“The Sybil of the Rhine”) briefly explain her spiritual ecstasy, as representative of them all:

“Again I heard a voice from heaven, saying to me: Speak of these marvels and write down what you have learned and say: In the year 1141 of the Incarnation of the Son of God, at the age of 42 years and 7 months, a flaming light of great brightness from the open heaven completely flooded my brain, heart, and breast like a flame that does not burn but warms, raising in me such a warmth as the sun does on all on which it sheds its rays. Immediately I was illuminated with a complete understanding and exposition of books like the Psalter and other Catholic tomes, both of the Old and New Testament.”⁵¹

It was through monasticism and mysticism that a significant part of the visible church lost their focus and, in many cases, also their faith. For directing one’s spiritual eyes inward can only lead to building upon the shifting sands of either works righteousness or personal experience⁵², rather than upon the solid, objective truth of the gospel. Tragically, in the cloisters the voice of gospel – not just the voices of the monks – was often silenced, preventing anxious hearts from hearing God’s joyful answer to the soul’s cry for peace and rest.

⁴⁵ Lackner, *op.cit.* p.185

⁴⁶ Paul E. Szarmach, *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*. (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1984) p.47: “Compunction is further a humility of spirit: it proceeds from the recollection of sins and our fear of final judgment... Smaragdus, following Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville, distinguishes four aspects of interior movement through which our minds are overtaken by compunction, by that beneficial state of anxiety’ (*taedio salubri compungitur*). 1)Reminder of past sins 2)Thought of eternal suffering 3)Contemplation of our dangerous earthly pilgrimage 4)Hope, our desire of attaining the eternal homeland.. These four basic elements correspond to the four questions each human must ask himself: ‘Where have I been? Where will I end up? Where am I now? What lies ahead in the future?’”

⁴⁷ Jean LeClercq OSB, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1982). Dom LeClercq, a Benedictine (who, of course, cannot write impartially) explains: “What exactly does the expression ‘royal road’ mean? These words designate a public thoroughfare as opposed to a private road, but mean also a straight, direct road rather than paths which are more or less winding. The expression ‘royal road’ understood in this way corresponds to a precise idea and image which were very widespread in the ancient world, esp. in Egypt. the conception implied in this case is that of the state roads which all lead, without detours, to the capital of the kingdom where the king resides; they furnish no communication with the villages they bypass; they have no turnings; they are comfortable, without danger; they take one unflinchingly to one’s destination. The royal road becomes the equivalent of the monastic life.” In other words, the ‘royal road’ was the most direct route to a spiritual experience with God.

⁴⁸ Bernard’s mysticism was so well-known that Dante gives him the privilege of conducting the poet in *Paradiso* to the greatest experience, the final vision of God.

⁴⁹ See Gonzalez, *History*, p.209. Simeon believed in a form of ‘deification’, which came only through ‘illumination’, not even through good works.

⁵⁰ To give an idea of how distorted mystic vision had become, Szarmach, *op.cit.*, (p. 170) relates that shortly after 1281 Gertrude “prayed for and received the *invisible stigmata*” (emphasis mine).

⁵¹ Szarmach, *op.cit.* p. 164. Further: “Like all of her sister mystics, Hildegard carefully delineates how she experienced these visions: ‘I did not perceive these visions in dreams or sleeping, or in a trance, nor with exterior ears of man or in hidden places, but by God’s will, beheld them wide awake and clearly, with the mind, eyes, and ears of the inner man.’”

⁵² LeClercq, *op.cit.* p. 212: “But altogether the great difference between the theology of the schools and that of the monasteries resides in the importance which the latter accord the experience of union with God. This experience in the cloister is both the principle and the aim of the quest. It can be said of St Bernard that his watchword was not ‘*Credo ut intelligam*’ but ‘*Credo ut experiar.*’”

Upward

While fleeing the world, though, strangely enough it was also these sequestered saints who were, ultimately, a tremendous blessing to the society they sought to escape: Through their influence, they taught the rest of God's people outside their cloisters to look upward.⁵³ The great cathedrals that soared heavenward shortly after the new millennium arrived had the monasteries as their bedrock. The art and music within cathedrals which lifted up medieval souls (and which still lift modern souls) originated within their walls. Their contributions in this field provide us with more than a little good about which to talk; they are rays of light shining into the dark woods.

The East had promoted beautiful worship, especially in Constantinople, long before the new millennium arrived. San Vitale in Ravenna had been standing for centuries, and the Hagia Sophia remained the crown jewel of Eastern church buildings. Interestingly enough, it was worship at Hagia Sophia that proved the deciding factor in Vladimir I's conversion to Christianity. Having heard delegations of Muslims, Jews, and even Latin Christians, Vladimir sent his own envoys to Constantinople who then returned to Kiev with the report of their worship experience in the massive cathedral: "We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth."⁵⁴ Vladimir was won over by their report, an historical observation which tends to support modern contentions that beautiful, majestic, liturgical worship and outreach may, after all, have something to do with each other.⁵⁵

In the West, a positive attitude toward beautiful worship in our time period flowed from the monastery at Cluny. Unlike the Cistercians, who sought to hide their cloisters in the recesses of wood and valley, Cluny's soaring bell tower (a first in Europe) was "a landmark indicative of the territory over which God reigns."⁵⁶ In building, the Cluniacs were the first to experiment with the groined vault, designed in an effort to raise the roof for better resonance of their songs.⁵⁷ Symbolic capitals, depicting various stages in the Passion, appeared on the tops of supporting columns, encouraging the monks to visually make their daily pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁵⁸ Their festivals were times of special grandeur.⁵⁹ They borrowed from the East and introduced to the West the celebration of the *Trishagion* of Holy Week.⁶⁰

These would become part of the Benedictine legacy to the larger church, and it was the larger church that took these monastic ideas to new heights. The advent of the Gothic style in art and architecture is one of those dates in artistic movements we can pinpoint with relative certainty. The Gothic style began with the restoration of the Church of St. Denis in Paris (1140-44) under the auspices of the Benedictine Abbot Suger. Soon Gothic began to replace the Romanesque, and its advantage was clearly seen. However, it is an oversimplification to say that the transition from the rounded arch of the Romanesque to the pointed arch and groined vault was the essence of Gothic. Suger himself indicates that the predominant emphasis in Gothic was

⁵³ An observation of William and Eric Neil, *Two Thousand Years of Christian Art*. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1966) On p.84-85: "In art and architecture, in music and drama, in the whole splendid outburst of the Christian spirit in the Middle Ages, the seeds were sown and nurtured by the monastic orders which began as a flight from the world and ended by becoming the world's benefactors."

⁵⁴ McManners, ed., *ibid*

⁵⁵ In the August 2000 issue of *MetroLutheran* (a Twin Cities publication) an article on Lutheran worship reported on the results of a recent nationwide survey showing "among those in their 20's, 47% don't appreciate 'entertainment worship'; 88% want a genuine encounter with God; 87% want real substance in worship; and 86% want more frequent Eucharist."

⁵⁶ Gregoire, *op.cit.* p.141

⁵⁷ Gregoire, *op.cit.* p.144 The design was also a measure taken for fire safety, but this was only a secondary consideration.

⁵⁸ Andrew MacLiesh ed. *Medieval Studies at Minnesota 2: The Medieval Monastery* (St. Cloud: North Star Press of St. Cloud, Inc., 1988) p.5. One of the essays in this collection notes that later Bernard would say that monks should make the pilgrimage 'with feelings not with feet', as opposed to an actual journey via crusade. Bernard, though, personally despised adornment in worship facilities, considering them *curiosas depictions* "curious depictions" that distracted the mind from fervent prayer. (cf. p. 1) But LeClercq (*op.cit.*, p.245) notes that the capitals inside the Cluny worship hall were "not the chimeras which St. Bernard deprecated", but rather "the Christological symbols for the different tones of the chant" – a fascinating interplay of form and function.

⁵⁹ For examples, see Lackner, *op.cit.* p.56: "On the feast of Candlemas, 'half the church was adorned with hangings, twelve candelabras burned before the altar and five behind; on it were three golden chalices and two golden candlesticks."

⁶⁰ Lackner, *op.cit.* p.60

on light, beautified by stained glass⁶¹, that created an environment in which the soul could soar upward, an environment worthy of the celebration of the greatest divine mystery, the holy Eucharist. An inscription he had placed on the doors of the new St. Denis reads:

All you who seek to honor these doors,
Marvel not at the gold and expense but at the craftsmanship of the work.
The noble work is bright, but, being nobly bright, the work
Should brighten the minds, allowing them to travel through the lights
To the true light, where Christ is the true door.
The golden door defines how it is imminent in these things.
The dull mind rises to the truth through material things,
And is resurrected from its former submersion when the light is seen.⁶²

It was also within the walls of the Gothic cathedrals that a new song would rise upward, as near 1000 A.D. Western music made its most important leap forward when, in the schools of Leonin and Perotin at Notre Dame, monophonic chant was replaced by polyphony.⁶³ As church music passed from chant to sequence to trope to motet in the two centuries after 1000, hymnody in its modern form began to take shape. According to this essayist's count, fourteen texts and eleven tunes from this time period still echo in WELS churches from the pages of our new hymnal, and we are the better for it.⁶⁴

More than simply fostering transcendence, however, "the cathedral was the theological summa of the ignorant."⁶⁵ There was purpose behind the beauty; within the walls and yes, even by the walls, illiterate lay-folk were taught the Catholic faith. Liturgical dramas appeared, especially in connection with Christmas and Easter, as priests tried to drive home to the laity the basic truths of the Bible.⁶⁶ In the late twelfth century, sermons specifically addressed to the various castes of feudal society also began to appear.⁶⁷ And the buildings themselves were classrooms. When one enters Chartres Cathedral, for example, one can see how the very stones and stained glass windows were designed with teaching purposes in mind. One window traces the life of Christ, another his ancestry from Jesse. One window walks us through the Passion, frame by frame. In the lancet windows just below the South Rose window, the four evangelists sit on the shoulders of the four major prophets, symbolically showing that the New Testament is based on the Old but sees farther – things the

⁶¹ There are magnificent Romanesque style basilicas: Durham, Speyer, Vezelay, St. Peter's of Rome. But the limitation of the style lay in the fact that thick supportive walls had to help carry the weight of the roof, permitting only small, deeply recessed windows (except for the clerestory). This was partially intentional as the Mediterranean sun under which Byzantine and Romanesque grew up was a real force to be contended with. (See Neil, *Christian Art*, p.122) But the groined vault of the Gothic distributed the weight better, especially when braced with flying buttresses. This freed up vast areas of wall space to be filled in with decorative glass. The impressive window behind the high altar at York Minster, for example, is as large as a modern tennis court, and traces from bottom to top the entire history of the world from Genesis to Revelation.

⁶² IMS Abbot Suger on His Administration (*De Administratione*). <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/sugar.html> The abbot continued: "Thus sometimes when, because of my delight in the beauty of the house of God, the multicolor loveliness of the gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation, transporting me from material to immaterial things, has persuaded me to examine the diversity of holy virtues, then I seem to see myself existing on some level, as it were, beyond our earthly one, neither completely in the slime of earth nor completely in the purity of heaven. By the gift of God I can be transported in an anagogical manner from this inferior level to that superior one."

⁶³ For a more detailed account of this and other important developments in medieval music, see Donald J. Grout's *A History of Western Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1960) pp.68-106

⁶⁴ Such as "Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel"(CW 23); "O Sacred Head Now Wounded" (CW 105) and "O Jesus, King Most Wonderful" (CW 373)--both hymns attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux; "Jerusalem the Golden" (CW 214 - Bernard of Cluny); "Christ is Arisen" (CW 144); "Christ the Lord is Risen Today; Alleluia!" (CW 150). Also, a few hymn texts/tunes that Luther adapted: CW 161, 266, 534, 285, 190.

⁶⁵ Gonzalez, *History*, p.221

⁶⁶ Marshall W. Baldwin, *Christianity Through the 13th Century* (New York: Walker and Co., 1970) on p.241-42 describes the *Quem Quaeritis* ("Whom seek ye?") play that grew out of the liturgy, a reenactment of the events of Easter morning.

⁶⁷ McManners, ed., *op. cit.* p.216

ancients “longed to see, but did not (Mt.13:17).” Christ seated in glory above the door with his Twelve apostles greet us as we enter from the west, and statues of Old Testament figures watch us depart through the north doors.

But it is also important to note that, though glorious, the Gothic cathedrals did not only portray Christ as a majestic, unapproachable King, as often was the emphasis in the East. Early into the new millennium – again, beginning in the monasteries – there was a noticeable shift toward emphasizing the human Christ, the suffering Christ, the servant Christ. It is at this time that the corpus appeared on the cross, and the goal of priest and monk alike was to imitate Christ’s humility, compassion, and service, and not merely to contemplate his majesty.⁶⁸

The genius of medieval church architecture, that marvelously combined majesty with practicality, struck a balance that is still necessary for churches of our own age to find. Granted, we will never see the likes of Gothic cathedrals built in our circles. And, finally, wherever two or three come together in Christ’s name, that place is dignified by his presence. But as we seek to learn from history, these towering houses of worship beg us to remember, as we build or redecorate, the benefit derived from having an inspiring place to worship. They beg us to remember the meaning inherent in a Christian symbol, the emotions stirred as godly music fills the air, the inspiration that can come from colored glass filtering light. It is inevitable that modern technology will find its way into our places of prayer, and we should find all possible ways to teach the basic truths of the Christian faith to a society that is every bit (perhaps more!) as Biblically illiterate as Europe of a thousand years ago. That’s fine; the Gothic cathedrals were filled with all sorts of new technology too. Their innovations, however, were geared toward more than just the “practical” or even the “didactic.” Using the mediums of stained glass and stone, the cathedral builders touched not only the head but also the heart. Reaching heavenward, these churches were raised in faith by societies that understood the majesty of God and his Kingship perhaps better than our own. It is this writer’s humble opinion that care must be taken today to employ those things which not only teach, which are not only “practical,” but also help move people to lift their voices and hands upward in worship of Christ.⁶⁹

Downward

As these men facilitated the soul’s rise upward, at the same time the monks involved themselves in vital work less appreciated by the public. Indeed, much of feudal Europe was incapable of appreciating it, being largely illiterate. It was the monks who, when not looking upward, were looking downward in studying the books of antiquity, downward at the copyist’s desk where they diligently translated and replicated the literature and learning of the classic world and patristic era. These men sat down and put pen to paper in defense of the faith or in explanation of the faith. With their cathedral schools and cloister schools they also sought to instill in Europe a love of learning. And we owe them a debt of deep gratitude, recognizing that their oft unheralded labor did, in its own quiet way, do much to move the church forward in Christ.

There is too much to tell in this section (as in the others); we can only scratch the surface. But perhaps the best way to approach it is to focus on the differences between the monastic world and the Scholastic world, which began its rise in the late 12th century. The period from 900-1200 saw interesting shifts in the intellectual world. The first half is dominated by faith, the latter by reason.⁷⁰ In the first half Plato holds sway (largely under the influence of an 8th century document called Pseudo-Dionysius), but in the second half Aristotle

⁶⁸ Consider the following quote from Neil, *op.cit.* p. 122: “It is over-simplifying the picture to say that the Risen Christ of Byzantine art was replaced by the Crucified Sufferer of the Middle Ages. . . but concentration on the Cross is basically a recognition of the love of God which was not content to reign in majesty but came down among men to suffer and die for them.”

⁶⁹ Are PowerPoint presentations in the sermon the 21st century equivalent of the stained glass window, or our version of medieval liturgical drama? All technology may be received with thanks. . . but used with care. In our church building in Marietta, GA, a large screen in front would hide the cross, detracting from the beauty of the chancel. It also seems to this writer that such an approach may tend to overemphasize the cognitive domain at the expense of the affective. Teaching occurs in a sermon, of course, but proclamation (to the head and heart) is its primary purpose.

⁷⁰ E.G. Schwiebert’s assessment: “The Schoolmen were really armchair philosophers who thought that the answer to all problems would come to him who thought long and hard enough.” *Luther and His Times* (op.cit) p.165

(largely through the influence of Arab scholars) begins to assert himself. In the first half Anselm of Canterbury's famous maxim (copied from Augustine), *Credo ut intelligam* ("I believe in order to understand")⁷¹ would begin to be replaced by Abelard's assertion, *Intelligo ut credam* ("I understand in order to believe"). The monks were more students of history, the Scholastics students of philosophy.⁷² These are, however, broad generalities and not hard and fast rules.

The early part of our period, when faith ruled the head, gave us some notable scholarly work. Anselm of Canterbury (d.1109) served as apologist for the Christian faith, especially with his works *Proslogion* and *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why Did God Become Man?") Under the influence of Augustine, this latter work defends what we would call the 'forensic' view of justification, i.e. God's justice was satisfied through payment by Christ's death for humankind's offensive debt against God's holiness. Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153) is a towering figure, eliciting even the admiration of Luther centuries later.⁷³ *On Loving God, On Grace and Free Will*, and his many expository sermons on the Song of Songs have been preserved for us. *De Consideratione* ("On Consideration"), written to his former underling who was elected Pope Eugenius III, paints a fascinating and informative picture of the state of the church in the mid-1100's. Only a man of such stature as Bernard could speak so forcefully and bluntly to the chair of St. Peter, criticizing not only the ostentation of the papacy but also the many abuses tolerated in the church.⁷⁴

It was very natural for the monks to develop their love of learning. The *Rule* of Benedict ordered mandatory reading sessions at mealtimes, and personal reading sessions as well, especially over the winter months and during Lent.⁷⁵ Benedict had suggested a wholesome reading diet of the Church Fathers, and Cassian and Origen were popular choices. Yet assigned readings from pagan poets and authors also was not uncommon.⁷⁶ LeClercq summarizes the monastic attitude: "The culture. . . is rich in the possession of a twofold treasure. . . It consists, on the one hand, of the classical legacy, and on the other of the Christian heritage inseparably biblical and patristic. . . In the eyes of all men, the whole ancient heritage belongs to Christians who are guiding it at the last toward its true destiny."⁷⁷ *Florilegia* ("flowers" i.e. books of excerpts from various authors, similar to *What Luther Says*) became extremely popular in monastic schools. Bernard likewise underscored the importance of having an educated clergy: "How can an ignorant shepherd lead his flock into the pastures of divine teaching?"⁷⁸ The words still ring true today.

But if we owe a debt to the monks for the preservation of classical knowledge, they, in turn, owed a debt to the Arabs. By 900, Cordoba of Spain ranked high among the cultural cities of the world, with its public library of over 400,000 volumes. The Moors had established more than seventy public libraries in Spain by the tenth century (Christian Europe had none) and seventeen universities (Christian Europe had two).⁷⁹ Although

⁷¹ From Augustine's *Prologion*, (IMS: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/anselm.html>) which is perhaps better known for its "Ontological Argument" to prove God's existence. Here is his beautiful attitude: "I do not even try, Lord, to rise up to your heights, because my intellect does not measure up to that task; but I do want to understand in some small measure your truth, which my heart believes in and loved. Nor do I seek to understand so that I can believe, but rather I believe so that I can understand. For I believe this too, that "unless I believe I shall not understand" (Isa. 7:9).

⁷² LeClercq, *op.cit.* p.155

⁷³ Bernard McGinn writes this in the introduction to the critical edition of Bernard's *On Grace and Free Choice* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc. 1988) p.43-44. He suggests that the relationship between Luther and Bernard is thus far a largely untapped field, waiting for scholarly pursuit.

⁷⁴ "Whenever thou rememberest thy dignity as Sovereign Pontiff, reflect also that not only wert thou once, but that thou art still nothing better than the vilest slime of the earth. Let not thy consideration imitate nature, let it rather imitate a worthier model, the Author of nature, by uniting what is highest with what is lowest." (*De. Consid.* 11.9) quoted in Baldwin, *Thirteenth Century*, (op.cit) p.254-255.

⁷⁵ *Rule*, Ch. 38, 48. Available at Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/b/benedict/rule2/rule.html>

⁷⁶ See LeClercq, *op.cit.* p.124. Bernard of Cluny relates an interesting custom that had developed in many monasteries, namely, that when a monk asked the librarian for a book by a pagan author, he would hold open his hand (sign for "book") and then touch his finger to his ear to imitate a dog scratching, since pagan authors could be compared to dogs.

⁷⁷ p. 47. He also quotes Rhabanus Maurus: ". . .when we read pagan poets, when the books of the worldly wisdom fall into our hands. If we meet therein something useful, we convert it to our own dogma." They fostered a 'spoiling of Egypt' attitude.

⁷⁸ LeClercq, *op.cit.* p.205

⁷⁹ Reston, *op.cit.* p.118-119.

earlier translation efforts had been made (at Cluny, among other places), the floodgates of ancient knowledge were finally opened upon Latin Europe with the conquest of Toledo. Under Bishop Raymond of Toledo, Aristotle, Euclid, Hippocrates and others were translated and presented to Christian scholars.⁸⁰

The advent of these new intellectual treasures also sparked the rise of Scholasticism. Systematic theology was their forte, not practical.⁸¹ Here the names are well-known: Peter Abelard (d.1142), Peter Lombard (d.1164), Albertus Magnus (d.1280), and Thomas Aquinas (d.1274). Most notorious among them was Abelard, not only for his illicit love affair with Heloise, but also for the brash tone of his *Sic et Non*, which seemed to call into question certain truths of Scripture.⁸² We note his open disagreement with Anselm's view of justification⁸³; he attributed forgiveness only to God's love (*charitas*) and not Christ's vicarious atonement, undermining the objective nature of Christ's work. Abelard's well-known arrogance⁸⁴ provoked a harsh reaction from Bernard at the former's public trial for heresy in 1140. In addition to Abelard, others also trumpeted the power of reason, such as the Averroists, Spanish scholars greatly influenced by the Arab commentator on Aristotle, Averroes. They went as far as to hold that a given principle can, at the same time, be true to faith and false to reason, and in such instances reason is to be followed.⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas did his best to develop an approach to truth that synthesized faith and reason, Plato and Aristotle, in his monumental *Summa*, earning him lasting fame. In 1849 the papal encyclical *Aeterni Patris* declared that all Catholic seminaries be Thomistic in their systematic theology.

This quick review of this aspect of church history calls to our attention two important points. The first is that the church always needs to be alert to the many twists, turns, and variations by which the eternal conflict between faith and reason manifests itself. In our day and age, the historical critical approach to Scripture has been exposed for what it truly is, but not before wreaking havoc even in confessional Lutheran circles. What will be next? Faithful followers of Christ must be on their guard. One historian sounds a warning:

“Modern man is still living on the capital of the cross and the circle, of Christianity and antiquity; and the intellectual history of Western man is a continuous attempt to reconcile the one with the other, revelation with reason. This attempt has never succeeded, and it cannot succeed unless by compromise.”⁸⁶

Secondly, the work of the medieval translators and copyists serves to remind us of the importance of such work at all times in the history of the church. We can look at our shelves and thank God for all the confessional Lutheran material that our forefathers deemed worthy of translating into English for us.⁸⁷ We also thank God for the recent efforts of our own publishing house in presenting us with translations such as *The*

⁸⁰ Gonzalez, *Christian Thought* (op.cit) p.185-86

⁸¹ According to LeClercq, (p.167) Scholastic sermons became increasingly technical, with one manual of theirs on the art of preaching suggesting eighteen different ways to lengthen a sermon.

⁸² I say “seemed” because the format of *Sic et Non* is simply to put forth a question and quote opposing views without ever suggesting a preferred answer. Thus Abelard quoted obviously heretical viewpoints without making comment on them. His approach was more to let the reader decide for himself the answer to the question, given all the viewpoints. Lombard's *Sentences*, in contrast, did take the next step and suggest answers to the proposed questions. His methodology was well-received, as the text was still a standard all the way up to Reformation times.

⁸³ Gonzalez, *Christian Thought* (op.cit) p. 172

⁸⁴ Not just theologically, either. Consider his own words from *The History of My Calamities* as he described the effect (in his own eyes) that he had on women: “So distinguished was my name, and I possessed such advantages of youth and comeliness, that no matter what woman I might favor with my love, I dreaded rejection of none.” IMS:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/abelard-sel.html>

⁸⁵ K. Latourette *A History of Christianity, Vol. 1: Beginnings to 1500* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953) p. 508 Also, Gonzalez, *Story of Christianity*, (op.cit) p.316

⁸⁶ Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 165K.

⁸⁷ Discussions with our brothers Curt Jahn and Bob Koester of our Northwestern Publishing House called that to my attention. How blessed we are to have *Law and Gospel, Luther's Works, Concordia Triglotta, Biblical Christology, Pieper's Dogmatics*, and the works of Chemnitz: *Loci Theologici, The Lord's Supper, Ministry-Word-Sacrament, The Two Natures in Christ* - all because of the dedicated work of translators. Conversely, we also thank God for all the work he has permitted us to accomplish in translating confessional materials from English into other languages through gifted world missionaries and laity.

Wauwatosia Gospel, Timothy Verinus, and Hoenecke's Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, Vol IV. We thank God for other efforts too, such as that of the Repristinasion Press, which has made Gerhard and others available in English. But as the German language becomes less and less part of our heritage, the quiet labor of the monks serves as a sobering reminder that much work still needs to be done in this area, and we ought to view this task, too, as an important part of our small role in God's plans to move his body of believers forward in Christ.

Froward

Revelation had foretold that the visible church would turn into a froward harlot, and when it finally happened it was not a pretty sight. My dictionary defines 'froward' as "habitually disposed to disobedience and opposition." Unfortunately, this also is part of our task today – to note that this word, perhaps more than the others, characterized the medieval church at the dawn of the second millennium. When the light of the gospel is greatly obscured we can expect no less than spiritual rebellion against God. And the church's lack of guidance by the pure Word caused a profound loss of direction, witnessed in a number of ways.

Most notable during the period from 910-1215 is the transformation of the Roman See from a mere ecclesiastical office into a papal monarchy. At the beginning of our period, the papacy was morally bankrupt and under the control of corrupt, powerful Roman families.⁸⁸ By the end of our period the pope, in the person of Innocent III, was the most powerful man in Europe. This rise was achieved through various struggles with kings and emperors, as church and state vied for mastery of Europe's political board.

Interestingly, throughout the period of this transformation there were two popular legends about king and pope circulating among the monks and the masses. Both legends were bound up with various apocalyptic schemas that tried to pinpoint the date of the end of the world. In the first half of our time frame, there was a popular myth concerning the Last World Emperor. He would be a champion for truth and justice and the church, destroying the revealed Antichrist and ushering in a period of unparalleled peace. But as the earthly German emperors struggled with the rising papacy for control, many speculated that the emperor was the very Antichrist for his continual opposition to Christ's vicar. In the latter half of our time frame, to replace the Last World Emperor myth there arose the legend of the Angelic Pope – a pious reformer who would occupy Peter's chair and, again, bring about (what we would call) a post-millennial era. Ironically, though, by the end of the thirteenth century, it was the pope who would be labeled as Antichrist.⁸⁹

After the millennium had passed, Christian Europe's hope for either a pious Last World Emperor or Angelic Pope would not be realized. In the tenth century some had worked for a hand-in-hand leadership of Christian Europe, but such ventures were only briefly successful.⁹⁰ From the mid-11th century to the mid-13th, the struggle between pope and emperor for control dominated the life of the church. The first phase of this struggle, usually called the Investiture Controversy, was the most famous and intense of these showdowns, as Henry IV and Gregory VII dug in on either side of the Alps. Their contest left us with some famous events:

⁸⁸ Think, for example, of the "Cadaveric Council" of 897, when Pope Stephen VI disinterred the corpse of his predecessor, Formosus, dressed him in robes, and put him on trial. Not surprisingly, Formosus (apparently not having a good defense) was found guilty of various charges. His fingers were broken off and his body burned. Sergius III (904) had two opponents (Leo V and Christopher I) jailed and murdered. Cf. Gonzalez, *Story of Christianity*, p.275 Also Reston (*op. cit.*) p.181 relates how John XII (mid-900's) "had fathered a number of children and had given away the church's treasure to his concubines. The Lateran Palace had been turned into a brothel, and John XII did not seem to care in what shape his women came nor from what station."

⁸⁹ McGinn, *op.cit.* p.186: "The contrast between the compromised popes of the time and wide-spread hopes for more saintly popes to come was at the root of the formation of a new and potent apocalyptic myth during the course of the thirteenth century, the legend of the '*pastor angelicus*,' the Angelic Pope. . . Apocalyptic themes could be used not only to strengthen hopes for a holy pope to come, but also as a weapon to attack a present pope whose lack of sanctity, opulence of life, or involvement in politics might be an occasion for scandal. Since the Antichrist had long been portrayed as a false teacher sitting in the Temple (i.e. the Church), one might go a step further and identify some present or proximate occupant of the Chair of Peter with the Final Enemy. The identification of the pope with the Antichrist begins in the thirteenth not the sixteenth century."

⁹⁰ This was Otto the Great's dream, a kingdom where emperor and pope labored side by side in harmony. If such an ideal was realized at all, one could argue that this was briefly done during the reign of Otto III when Sylvester II (the first French pope, a scholar in his own right) worked in harmony for the stability and furtherance of the Holy Roman Empire.

Gregory's watershed document called the *Dictatus Papae*, (1075)⁹¹, Henry's barefoot repentance at Canossa (1078), a temporary truce called "Paschal's Privilege" (1111) and, finally, the compromise in the Concordat of Worms (1122).⁹²

It is beyond the scope of this essay to walk through the complex history of this struggle between church and state.⁹³ However, for our purposes of showing the "frowardness" of the church, we may make a couple of observations. First, in this struggle we can see the disastrous results for faith and life that an allegorical approach to Scripture can produce. For in the last phase of the papacy's push to power, Rome used Bernard's allegorical interpretation of Luke 22:38 ("See, Lord, here are two swords")⁹⁴ to provide justification for subduing the secular sword under the spiritual.

Secondly, it was largely due to Rome asserting herself more and more that a gap arose between East and West, a rift made permanent by the schism of 1054. We are not saying that Rome was not the only one to blame for the break, but of the two she was more to blame. Constantinople had always been willing to concede to Rome a primacy of respect as a human arrangement (*de iure humano*) – a primacy that even our Lutheran Confessions are willing to concede⁹⁵ – but when Rome began to claim such primacy was the divine order of things (*de iure divino*), this went too far in the eyes of the East. Nicetas, Archbishop of Nicomedia explained in the twelfth century:

"We do not deny to the Roman Church the primacy amongst the five sister Patriarchates. But she has separated herself from us by her own deeds, when through pride she assumed a monarchy which does not belong to her office. How shall we accept decrees from her that have been issued without consulting us and even without our knowledge? If the Roman Pontiff, seated on the lofty throne of his glory, wishes to thunder at us, and if he wishes to judge us and even to rule us and our churches, not by taking counsel with us but at his own arbitrary pleasure, what kind of brotherhood, or even what kind of parenthood can this be? We should be the slaves, not the sons, of such a Church, and the Roman See would not be the pious mother of sons but a hard and imperious mistress of slaves."⁹⁶

Also, thirdly, as the Roman church became more enmeshed in the affairs of the world it also showed more than ever its unhealthy penchant for exerting control over others, instead of serving others in love, as our Lord commands. Such a struggle between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* never arose in the East because Constantinople didn't feel the need (as we have already noted in their approach to mission work) to impose a rigid conformity upon its people. The Eastern mindset was different from Rome when it came to religious oversight.⁹⁷ Likewise, Rome in the south never fully understood the northern German mindset. No one debated

⁹¹ This document lays the foundation for medieval papal power. Most primary source collections (e.g. Tierney, Hartwig, Baldwin) have reprinted it. Also available at IMS: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/g7-dictpap.html> We note a couple of the more important statements: #9-11 – "That of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet. That his name alone shall be spoken in the churches. That this is the only name in the world." #22 – "That the Roman church has never erred; nor will it err to all eternity, the Scripture bearing witness."

⁹² All these – and a number of other primary source documents that trace the struggle between church and state – can be found at IMS.

⁹³ If interested in this famous church-state conflict, the reader is encouraged to read and digest a collection of essays on the topic, entitled *The Gregorian Epoch: Reformation? Revolution? Reaction?* Edited by Schafer Williams. Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1964.

⁹⁴ *De Consideratione*, Bk. IV.3 Used to bolster the church's claim that they are the rightful owners of both 'swords.'

⁹⁵ *Smalcald Art. Art.XV.7* – Melancthon's signature of the document. "But regarding the Pope I hold that, if he would allow the Gospel, his superiority over the bishops which he has otherwise, is conceded to him by human right also by us, for the sake of the peace and general unity of those Christians who are also under him, and maybe under him hereafter." His attached treatise, though, of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, makes it clear that the Roman papacy in its present state could not be accorded such a right.

⁹⁶ Noll, *op.cit.* p.138

⁹⁷ McManners, ed., *op.cit.* p.129: "Whereas the Western church during the Middle Ages grew increasingly monarchical, Orthodox Christians in Byzantine as in modern times have always seen their church as conciliar. At each true council, on the Orthodox understanding, the miracle of Pentecost is renewed; the Holy Spirit descends, the many become one in mind and heart, and the truth is revealed."

that real reformation was needed to address the problems in the church. But pope and emperor came at the problems from two different angles, creating a war for control in the process.⁹⁸ Of the two parties, the papacy is more to blame. After all, what business does the visible leader of the church have, for example, raising armies and battling the king, as against Barbarossa at Legnano (1176)? By what right does Innocent III (1198-1216) hold Portugal, Poland, Hungary, and Serbia as vassal states, or receive the entire nation of England back as a fief from King John Lackland in return for lifting the Interdict? Was it with a shepherd's heart that Boniface VIII would end his *Unam Sanctam* (1302) by stating: "Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff."⁹⁹

Bernard had warned against such abuses in *De Consideratione*, but they came anyway. And it was the common people that suffered for their leaders' failings. It does not come as a surprise that, as emperor and pope struggled for supremacy, spiritual vacuums were created in which heretical groups sprung to life – the Cathars¹⁰⁰, the Bogomils¹⁰¹, the Waldensians¹⁰², among others. They were heretics, of course. But many times these groups arose as reactions to the institutional formalism and the *ex opere operato* ritualism fostered by the church. These often were people simply seeking to make Christianity real in their daily lives. Nor is it any wonder that the obviously false millennial visions of Joachim of Fiore (b.1130), which promised to usher in the Age of the Holy Spirit in 1260, met with such warm reception.¹⁰³ Because the visible church had lost direction, superstitions were also popular among the masses.¹⁰⁴ The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which in many ways is the natural climax of the Cluny reform movement begun in 910, tried to spark among the clergy true pastoral care of the common folk, but it was too little, too late; the canons would never be fully implemented among the parishes of Europe. Popular religion was to many nothing more than ritual, and most were ignorant of even the basics of the Christian faith. One scholar observed the tragic results of medieval Europe's poor spiritual leadership: "This was a society that was all too aware of its sins, all too uncertain of its forgiveness."¹⁰⁵

The Crusades merit more than a paragraph, but in our context it is enough to note the damage this exertion of papal power brought upon the people. Thousands died, including children. Violence in the name of Christ was sanctioned. Palestine was not viewed as a mission field, but the home of the enemy infidel, whose deaths were God-pleasing.¹⁰⁶ The tragic and terrible sack of Constantinople (1204) in which Christian put to

⁹⁸ Schwiebert (op.cit) explains, p. 162: "Where the Teutonic element predominated, the Gothic temper expressed itself differently in institutions and thought. The Church, for example, in the Mediterranean lands where the Latin element predominated was episcopal in organization and thought. Here the bishop was the central figure, which fact was in time to culminate in the centralization of the Roman hierarchy of Rome. In Germanic lands, however, where Teutonic law was in control, the Church became an 'Eigenkirche' in which the ruler retained the land on which the altar stood and the Church became his own private property. It was this situation, very disturbing to the Latin mind, which in part caused Pope Gregory VII to engage in the 'Investiture Controversy,' which brought Emperor Henry IV to Canossa." And again notes (p. 157): "Reinhold Seeberg says that the gulf between the Germanic and Latin minds was never bridged by medieval theology. The German had always regarded religion as a personal and individual experience. The idea of the mystical body of Christ embodied only in the Roman church and the hierarchy always seemed foreign to Teutonic thought."

⁹⁹ IMS <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/b8-unam.html>

¹⁰⁰ "Pure ones." At times also called the Albigensians. Revived Manichaean dualistic teachings. Attacked efficacy of sacraments. Read *A Cathar Gospel* at IMS: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/cathar-gospel.html> Also, *Caesarius of Heisterbach: Medieval Heresies* at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/caesarius-heresies.html> (also for Waldensians)

¹⁰¹ The Bogomils originated in the East, and were the forerunners of the Cathars. Manichaean. See IMS: *Anna Comnena: The Bogomils, c. 1110*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/comnena-bogomils.html>

¹⁰² The Waldensians emphasized preaching and faith, similar to later Lutheran Pietists.

¹⁰³ See Lowith, *op.cit.* pp.148-50. The year 1260 was arrived at when Joachim divided the history of the world into three periods of 42 generations each. The division was also Trinitarian; 1260 A.D. was to usher in the Third Age, the Age of the Spirit, in which mystics would lead and guide the church. Though personally not condemned, one of Joachim's disciples (after his death) Gerard of Borgo San Donnino wrote a book entitled *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel* in which he announced the imminent end of the world, even stating that Joachim's writings were to be preferred to Scripture. Gerard was condemned to life imprisonment.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *Ordeal by Boiling Water, 12th or 13th Cent.* At IMS: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/Water-ordeal.html>

¹⁰⁵ McManners, ed., *op.cit.* p.106

¹⁰⁶ The attitude changed dramatically from pre-crusade times. Gregory VII had issued a letter to the Muslim ruler al-Nasir in 1076 stressing the common root (Abraham) of Islam and Christianity, making the ecumenical overtone that 'we believe and confess one

sword Christian reveals how unspiritual and misdirected the entire program had become. Moreover, the seeds for the Inquisition were planted through the Crusades, which would usher in yet another period marked by atrocities committed in the name of God. But the greatest damage of the Crusades was spiritual. Urban II's announcement of the First Crusade at Clermont (1095)¹⁰⁷ promised forgiveness of sins for journeys to Jerusalem and immediate transportation to heavenly glory for death in battle. This proclamation openly undermined justification through faith in Christ, the chief article of the Christian faith.

And were not all these things enough, the appointed watchmen of the church let down their guard and allowed other doctrinal aberrations to become commonplace. Transubstantiation was debated and finally made official dogma at Lateran IV (1215), the same council at which mandatory, once-a-year confession and reception of the sacrament was ratified. Cluny reintroduced the cult of Mary to the West, borrowed from Constantinople.¹⁰⁸ Papal taxation made its appearance, as did indulgences.¹⁰⁹ So also did other popular notions which would eventually be sanctioned by the Catholic Church: the immaculate conception of Mary, the perpetual virginity of Mary, the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.¹¹⁰ Moreover, all this was taking place across a landscape dotted with monasteries in which monks taught salvation by works, while sharing their ecstatic visions and daily celebrating masses for the dead. For the untold damage these teachings brought upon simple souls, the froward church had become "a bitter place. Death could scare be bitterer."

Forward? . . . Forward

Do we, living centuries later, dare to conclude that the church moved forward in Christ at the dawn of the second millennium? Don't even secular historians confidently assert that these years mark a low point in Christian history? Doesn't an objective look at the historical record force us to admit that the visible church was going more 'untoward' than 'forward'?

Perhaps, if we only look objectively. But God's people don't only look at things objectively; they also look at things with the eyes of faith in the risen and ascended Lord and make spiritual judgments about all things (1 Co. 2:15). And with the eyes of faith we can look at this era and honestly conclude that the church did, under God's governance, move forward in Christ. She moved forward not because she was so faithful, but because her true Shepherd is always faithful and loving. In spite of stubborn man, God's holy plans always succeed, and the history of the church shows that again and again. I cannot claim to have perfect insight into this period of history. However, permit me to share a couple of things I noticed as I stared across the years through my partially fogged lenses.

For one, I think I see that the church-state struggle of our time period incited a budding nationalism in continental Europe¹¹¹ – a nationalistic movement that would, not even three centuries later, foster the great races to the West in the Age of Discovery. God was already beginning to lay his plans for the propagation of the gospel to lands yet unreached.

For another, the little bits of information, the quotes here and there, the hymns of hope and works of art from the historical record reveal that a loving Lord still had preserved a remnant of true believers in the simplicity of their faith, even though the visible church was rapidly going astray. In the days of Elijah he preserved seven thousand. In the days of John the Baptist a small group wondered, "Could he be the Christ?" – an amazing indicator that though the visible church had been promoting the idea of a messianic political King, there were still those looking anxiously for a spiritual redeemer, the kind whom John seem to personify. And, as we earlier pointed out, if only through the hymns, or stained glass, or statuary, or liturgy, the gospel was

God, admittedly in a different way.' (see McManners, *op.cit.* p.180) This sounds hauntingly familiar to a statement made by Pope John Paul II about Islam in the mid-1990's.

¹⁰⁷ IMS <http://www.fordbam-edu/halsall/source/urban2-5vers.html>

¹⁰⁸ Lackner, *op.cit.* p.59

¹⁰⁹ See J.L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p.205

¹¹⁰ On the Sacred Heart, see Szarmach, *op.cit.* p.168

¹¹¹ See Neve, *op.cit.* p.201

preached, giving us the confidence that because it was preached it did not then (as it does not now) return empty.

Another indicator of the loving control exercised by the Church's Head is how his Word was preserved for future generations, even through the hands of works-righteous men. The gospel was copied. The message that gives life to the Church would go forward to others. Prof. Fredrich (*der Alt.*) once wrote: "There in the cloister, amid so much that breathed anti-gospel spirit, the gospel found a quiet chamber, a cradle for its slumber time. Preserved by the miracle of heavenly mercy, the gospel gained renewed strength for the day of restoration and for the great leap forward."¹¹² A faithful Lord was guarding the gospel for the next phase of his divine plan.

The tainted theological writings of men from this time would also serve God's divine purpose in the future. For all their brilliant insights, they did not completely satisfy one particular monk who pored over them, trying to find peace for his own soul. But God would use them to lead Luther not just back to Lombard, not just back to Bernard, nor even just back to Augustine; through them all he would lead Luther back to St. Paul himself, in whose declaration "The righteous will live by faith" (Ro. 1:17) he would finally find spiritual food that did not spoil, but endures to eternal life (Jn.6:27).

Yes, with the eyes of faith we can even say that the infiltration of so much openly false doctrine was allowed by the Almighty to work for his purpose. It was even through heresy and apostasy alike that the Lord forced a remnant to seek his face (Ps.105:4). Our brother Prof. Deutschlander has said it well: "In love therefore, yes, in love for us, for his Son, for his Word, [God] must, yes, he must allow heresy, coldness, division, and dissension to enter the church in order to drive her servants again to their knees and then back to the Scriptures."¹¹³ According to divine plan, the Antichrist began to be revealed – a road marker for the church on her march toward eternity to let her know that soon her Bridegroom will appear. And, according to divine plan, the Antichrist would be overthrown by the breath of God's mouth when his Word was restored (2 Th. 2:8). Though a dark period, our period nevertheless is a shining testament to this truth, that though the visible church may lose direction, veering off this way or that, or fail in misguided efforts at self-reformation, behind the scenes of history our faithful Lord is surely, steadily accomplishing his will and moving his people forward in Christ. Just as for Israel in Egypt of old, things would get worse before they got better. But this only serves to heighten the contrast between man's work and God's, between his grace and power and our sinful failings. God himself would set the visible church on the right path again. God himself would work a reformation among his people which they could not work on their own. God himself would do and act in such a way that every time we read this history he makes us marvel at his grace. This is the "good that comes from it all," and our period serves as a stepping stone to that glorious goal. Other church history tells us that goal would be reached. The church's overcast morning at the dawn of the second millennium would give way to the bright day of the Reformation, when the sun of righteousness rose so majestically with healing in its wings (Mal. 4:2). And we humbly give thanks today that by God's rich grace we are still basking in its eternal light.

¹¹² E.C. Fredrich, *op.cit.*. WLS Essay File www.wels.net/wls/library/Essays

¹¹³ *His Word, Our Delight* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998) p. 57. This is a collection of faculty chapel devotions from the last operating year of Northwestern College.

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