

## CHAPTER 10

# *A New Civilization Emerges in Western Europe*

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### Chapter Outline Summary

#### I. Stages of Postclassical Development

6th to 10th centuries

fragmentation prevailed

Catholic Church strong

Iberia

Arab Muslims

Core: France, Low Countries, Germany

later, England

Scandinavian Vikings

raids from 8th to 10th centuries

Literacy declined

except among churchmen

#### A. The Manorial System: Obligations and Allegiances

Local, personal political organization

Manorialism

agricultural economy

reciprocal obligations

in-kind labor for produce

serfdom

800s

agricultural innovation

moldboard

crop rotation

#### B. The Church: Political and Spiritual Power

Popes follow Roman organization

appointed bishops

sponsored missionaries

Monasticism

Benedict of Nursia

Benedictine rule

spiritual functions

holiness

network

pilgrimage centers

secular functions

education

large estates

shelter travelers

#### C. Charlemagne and His Successors

Frankish Carolingian dynasty

Charles Martel

732, Tours

Charles the Great (Charlemagne)

800, crowned emperor

- copied Roman central administration
- 814, death
  - empire fragments
- 843, Treaty of Verdun
  - three kingdoms
- Holy Roman Emperors
  - ruled Germany, Italy
- D. New Economic and Urban Vigor
  - Agricultural improvements
    - increased production
    - surplus, wealth, population growth
  - Towns grow
    - literacy expanded
  - Education
    - cathedral schools, from 11th century
    - universities, from 13th century
- E. Feudal Monarchies and Political Advances
  - Personal relationship
    - military service for land
  - Some lords emerged more powerful
    - e.g. Capetian kings of France
    - developed bureaucracies, states
  - William the Conqueror
    - 1066, Norman conquest of England
    - centralized government
      - sheriffs, courts
- F. Limited Government
  - Political fragmentation continued
    - monarchs limited by church, nobles, towns
  - 1215, Magna Carta
    - King John recognized supremacy of written law
  - Representative bodies
    - Catalonia, from 1000
    - England, from 1265
  - Monarchs continued to increase in power
    - large conflicts
      - e.g. Hundred Years War
- G. The West's Expansionist Impulse
  - Germanic knights
    - from 11th century, into eastern Germany, Poland
  - Iberia
    - northern Christian states began *reconquista*
  - Vikings
    - crossed Atlantic
  - Crusades
    - called by Urban II, 1095
    - initial success
    - new contact with Islam
- H. Religious Reform and Evolution
  - Gregorian reform, 11th century
    - based in monasteries

Gregory VII

separation of secular and religious spheres

Mendicants, 13th century

St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Dominic

I. The High Middle Ages

## II. Western Culture in the Postclassical Era

A. Theology: Assimilating Faith and Reason

Exploration of Greek philosophy

Peter Abelard, 12th century

rational examination of doctrine

Bernard of Clairvaux

opposed to Abelard's approach

mysticism

Debate in universities

Thomas Aquinas

*Summas*

faith primary, reason leads to understanding

scholasticism

Roger Bacon

B. Popular Religion

Survival of pagan practice

C. Religious Themes in Art and Literature

Romanesque architecture

especially monastic buildings

Gothic

from 11th century

12th century

vernacular, secular literature

e.g. *Song of Roland*

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*

*troubadours*

## III. Changing Economic and Social Forms in the Postclassical Centuries

A. New Strains in Rural Life

Peasants v. landlords

peasants slowly gained

B. Growth of Trade and Banking

Commerce expanded

Mediterranean zone joined with North Sea, Baltic

Money replaced barter

Banking, insurance merged

Hanseatic League

northern Germany, southern Scandinavia

cities joined to encourage trade

Merchants relatively free

but relatively low status

Guilds

craft associations

protect markets

ensure standards

social role

C. Limited Sphere for Women

Women generally lose ground  
Some opportunities as nuns

#### **IV. The Decline of the Medieval Synthesis**

Widespread warfare from 1300 to 1500

100 Years' War

weakens feudal order

Population outstrips agriculture

famines

Bubonic Plague (Black Death)

from 1348

##### A. Signs of Strain

Aristocracy lost military purpose

foot soldiers more important

became increasingly decorative

Church became increasingly rigid

##### B. The Postclassical West and Its Heritage

Formative period

dynamic change

## **Chapter Summary**

**Chapter Summary.** The postclassical period in western Europe, known as the Middle Ages, stretches between the fall of the Roman Empire and the 15th century. Typical postclassical themes prevailed.

Civilization spread gradually beyond the Mediterranean zone. Christian missionaries converted Europeans from polytheistic faiths. Medieval Europe participated in the emerging international community. New tools and crops expanded agricultural output; advanced technologies improved manufacturing. Mathematics, science, and philosophy were stimulated by new concepts.

**St. Godric.** The life of the Englishman Godric—ultimately canonized as St. Godric—incorporates many aspects of medieval Europe. The son of a farmer, Godric became a merchant, expanding his business to the continent. However, he became dissatisfied with this life devoted to acquiring wealth, feeling it was at odds with the dictates of Christianity. He began to visit holy places, and eventually made the pilgrimage to Rome. Finally, he rejected the material life altogether, and became a hermit. His life reflects the conflicting values in postclassical Europe, which became more apparent as commerce developed. Several themes can be seen in Europe following the collapse of the Roman Empire. Roman, Christian culture spread north, beyond the limits of the former Roman civilization. Christianity was expanded by the newly converted, both in territorial and cultural terms. Europe was increasingly brought into communication with other world areas, resulting in an influx of new technologies and new crops. Contact with the Byzantine and Arab worlds was particularly influential.

**Two Images.** Viewed by outsiders and by insiders, Europe presented divergent images. According to a Muslim writing in the 1100s, the Crusaders were backwards and uncouth. By comparison, our view of the scholar Thomas Aquinas in his own context is of a brilliant thinker, skillfully bringing the learning of the classical world into harmony with Christian doctrine. How can these two images be reconciled?

**Stages of Postclassical Development.** Between the 6th and 10th centuries C.E., disorder prevailed in western Europe. Although the Catholic church remained strong, Rome's fall left Italy in economic, political, and intellectual decline. Muslim-controlled Spain maintained a vibrant intellectual and economic life, but only later influenced European development. The postclassical west was centered in France, the Low Countries, and southern and western Germany. England later joined the core. Continual raids by Scandinavian Vikings hindered political and economic development. Intellectual activity sharply diminished; most literate individuals were Catholic monks and priests.

**The Manorial System: Obligations and Allegiances.** Until the 10th century, most political organization was local. Manorialism was a system of reciprocal economic and political obligations between landlords and peasants. Most individuals were serfs living on self-sufficient agricultural estates (manors). In return for protection, serfs gave lords part of their crops and provided labor services. Inferior technology limited agricultural output until the 9th century—introduction of the moldboard plow and the three-field cultivation system increased yields. Serfs bore many burdens, but they were not slaves. They had heritable ownership of houses and land as long as they met obligations.

**The Church: Political and Spiritual Power.** The Catholic church in the 1st centuries after 500 was the single major example of firm organization. The popes headed a hierarchy based upon the Roman imperial model; they appointed some bishops, regulated doctrine, and sponsored missionary activity. The conversion of Germanic kings, such as the Frankish Clovis around 496, demonstrated the spiritual and political power of the church. It also developed the monastic movement. In the 6th century, the Italian Benedict of Nursia created the most important set of monastic rules. Monasteries had both spiritual and secular functions. They promoted Christian unity, served as examples of holy life, improved cultivation techniques, stressed productive work, and preserved the heritage of Greco-Roman culture.

**Charlemagne and His Successors.** The Carolingian dynasty of the Franks ruling in France, Belgium, and Germany grew stronger during the 8th century. Charles Martel defeated Muslim invaders at Tours in 732. Charlemagne built a substantial empire by 800. He helped to restore church-based education and revived traditions of Roman imperial government. His empire fragmented soon after Charlemagne's death in 814. By 843, his grandsons had divided his territory, and their lines proved unable to revive his imperial achievements. Subsequent political history was marked by regional monarchies existing within a civilization with overarching cultural unity initially centered on Catholic Christianity. French, German, English, and other separate languages emerged, forming embryonic national identities. The rulers of Germany and northern Italy initially were the strongest; they called themselves holy Roman emperors, but they failed to create a solid monarchy. Local lords and city-states went their own way in these areas.

**New Economic and Urban Vigor.** During the 9th and 10th centuries new agricultural techniques—the moldboard plow, the three-field system, and the horse collar—significantly increased production. The use of stirrups confirmed the dominance of those wealthy enough to own horses. Viking incursions diminished as the raiders seized territorial control or regional governments became stronger in response. Both factors allowed population growth and encouraged economic innovation. Expanding towns emerged as regional trade centers with a merchant class and craft production. The need for more food led to exploitation of new lands. The demand for labor resulted in less harsh conditions for serfs. The growing urban centers increased the spread of literacy, revitalized popular culture, and stimulated religious life. By the 11th century, cathedral schools were evolving, to become universities in the 13th century. Students studied medicine and law; later theology and philosophy became important disciplines. Art and architecture reached new peaks.

**Feudal Monarchies and Political Advances.** From the 6th century, feudalism, a system of political and military relationships, evolved in western Europe. Military elites of the landlord class could afford horses and iron weapons. The greater lords provided protection to lesser lords (vassals) who in return supplied military and other service. Feudal relationships first served local needs, but they later were extended to cover larger regions. Charlemagne is an example of this phenomenon. Later rulers, notably the Capetian kings of France from the 10th century, used feudalism to evolve from regional lords to rulers controlling a larger territory. From local, personal rule they expanded, using bureaucratic administration and specialized officials. William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066 and merged feudal techniques with a more centralized government. English royal officials, sheriffs, supervised local justice. The growth of feudal monarchies independently duplicated developments found in other centralizing societies.

**Limited Government.** Western Europe remained politically divided. The lands of the Holy Roman Empire in Germany and Italy were controlled by dukes and city-states respectively. The pope ruled in central Italy. Regional units prevailed in the Low Countries. In strong feudal monarchies, power was limited by the church, aristocratic military strength, and developing urban centers. King John of England in 1215 was forced to recognize feudal rights in the *Magna Carta*. Parliaments, bodies representing

privileged groups, emerged in Catalonia in 1000. In England a parliament, operating from 1265, gained the right to rule on taxation and related policy matters. Most members of societies were not represented in European parliaments, but the creation of representative bodies was the beginning of a distinctive political process not present in other civilizations. Despite the checks, European rulers made limited progress in advancing central authority. Their weakness was demonstrated by local wars turning into larger conflicts, such as the Hundred Years War of the 14th century between the French and English.

**The West's Expansionist Impulse.** The ongoing political and economic changes spurred European expansion beyond its initial postclassical borders. From the 11th century, Germanic knights and agricultural settlers changed the population and environmental balance in eastern Germany and Poland. In Spain and Portugal, small Christian states in the 10th century began the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from Muslim Arab rulers. Viking voyagers crossed the Atlantic to Iceland, Greenland, and Canada. The most dramatic expansion occurred during the Crusades against Muslims in the Holy Land, first called by Pope Urban II in 1095. Christian warriors seeking salvation and spoils established kingdoms in the Holy Land enduring into the 13th century. Their presence helped to expose Europeans to cultural and economic influences from Byzantium and Islam.

**Religious Reform and Evolution.** The Catholic church went through several periods of decline and renewal. The church's wealth and power often led its officials to become preoccupied with secular matters. Monastic orders and popes from the 11th century worked to reform the church. Leaders, as Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi, purified monastic orders and gave new spiritual vigor to the church. Pope Gregory VII attempted to free the church from secular interference by stipulating that priests remain unmarried and prohibiting secular appointment of bishops. Independent church courts developed to rule on religious concerns.

**Thinking Historically: Western Civilization.** Western civilization is difficult to define. Postclassical western Europe incorporated only some elements of the classical heritage. A lack of political unity prevented the development of common structures. The first definition of the civilization was primarily religious, although individual cultures varied. There was no linguistic unity, but elements of cultural unity and social structure were present. By comparison, the unfolding civilization did not match the coherence of the Chinese system. A common European civilization emerged, one ready to benefit from the advances made in other world societies.

**The High Middle Ages.** Postclassical Western civilization reached its high point during the 12th and 13th centuries. Creative tensions between feudal political forms, emerging monarchies, and the authority of the church produced major changes in political, religious, intellectual, social, and economic life.

**Western Culture in the Postclassical Era.** Christianity was the clearest unifying cultural element in Western Europe.

**Theology: Assimilating Faith and Reason.** Before 1000 C.E., a few church members had attempted to preserve and interpret the ideas of earlier thinkers, especially Aristotle and Augustine. The efforts gradually produced a fuller understanding of the past, particularly in philosophy, rhetoric, and logic. After 1000 the process rose to new levels. Absolute faith in God's word was stressed, but it was held that human reason contributed to the understanding of religion and the natural order. In 12th-century Paris, Peter Abelard utilized logic to demonstrate contradictions in doctrine. Many church leaders opposed such endeavors and emphasized the role of faith for understanding religious mysteries. Bernard of Clairvaux successfully challenged Abelard and stressed the importance of mystical union with God. The debates matched similar tensions within Islam concerning philosophical and scientific traditions. In Europe there were increasing efforts to bridge this gap. By the 12th century, the debate flourished in universities, opening intellectual avenues not present in other civilizations. In China, for example, a single path was followed. The European universities produced men for clerical and state bureaucracies, but they also motivated a thirst for knowledge from other past and present civilizations. By the 13th century, Western thinkers had created a synthesis of medieval learning. Thomas Aquinas of Paris in his *Summas* held that faith came first, but that human reason allowed a greater understanding of natural order, moral law, and the nature of God. Although scholasticism deteriorated after Thomas, new paths for human understanding

had opened. Medieval philosophy did not encourage scientific endeavor, but a few scholars, as Roger Bacon, did important experimental work in optics and other fields.

**Popular Religion.** Although we do not know much about popular beliefs, Christian devotion ran deep within individuals. The rise of cities encouraged the formation of lay groups. The cults of the Virgin Mary and sundry saints demonstrated a need for more humble intermediaries between people and god. Pagan practices endured and blended into Christianity.

**Religious Themes in Art and Literature.** Christian art and architecture reflected both popular and formal themes. Religious ideas dominated painting, with the early stiff and stylized figures changing by the 14th and 15th centuries to more realistic portrayals that included secular scenes. Architecture initially followed Roman models. In the Romanesque style, rectangular buildings were surmounted by domes, with relatively small windows using rounded arches. During the 11th century, the Gothic style appeared, producing soaring spires and arched windows requiring great technical skills. Literature and music equally reflected religious interest. Latin writings dealt with philosophy, law, and politics. Vernacular literature developed, incorporating themes from the past, such as the English *Beowulf* and the French *Song of Roland*. Contemporary secular themes were represented in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Courtly poets (*troubadours*) in 14th-century southern France wrote of courtly love.

**Changing Economic and Social Forms in the Postclassical Centuries.** Apart from the cultural cement framed by the Catholic church, Western society had other common features in economic activity and social structure. The postclassical West demonstrated great powers of innovation. When trade revived in the 10th century the West became a kind of common commercial zone as merchants moved commodities from one region to another. Urban merchants won increased power.

**New Strains in Rural Life.** Agricultural improvements after 800 C.E. allowed some peasants to shake off the most severe manorial constraints. Noble landlords continued their military functions, but utilized trade to improve their living styles. The more complex economy increased landlord-peasant tensions. From then until the 19th century there were recurring struggles between the two groups. Peasants wanted more freedom and control of land, while landlords wanted higher revenues. In general, peasant conditions improved and landlord controls weakened. Although agriculture remained technologically backward when compared to other societies, it had surpassed previous levels.

**Growth of Trade and Banking.** Urban growth promoted more specialized manufacturing and commerce. Banking was introduced by Italian businessmen. The use of money spread rapidly. Large trading and banking operations clearly were capitalistic. Europeans traded with other world regions, particularly via Italian Mediterranean merchants, for luxury goods and spices. Within Europe, raw materials and manufactured items were exchanged. Cities in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia formed the Hanseatic League to encourage commerce. European traders, although entering into many economic pursuits, as demonstrated in the 15th-century career of Jacques Coeur, still generally remained less venturesome and wealthy than their Islamic counterparts. On the other hand, the weakness of Western governments allowed merchants a freer hand than in many civilizations. Many cities were ruled by commercial leagues, and rulers allied with them against the aristocracy. Apart from taxation and borrowing, governments left merchants alone, allowing them to gain an independent role in society. Most peasants and landlords were not part of a market system. In cities, the characteristic institution was the merchant or artisan guild. Guilds grouped people in similar occupations, regulated apprenticeships, maintained good workmanship, and discouraged innovations. They played an important political and social role in cities. Manufacturing and commercial methods in Europe improved, but they did not attain Asian levels in ironmaking and textile production. Only in a few areas, such as clockmaking, did they take the lead. By the late Middle Ages the Western medieval economy contained contradictory elements. Commercial and capitalistic trends jostled the slower rural economy and urban guild protectionism.

**Limited Sphere for Women.** As elsewhere, increasing complexity of social and economic life limited women's roles. Women's work remained vital to families. Christian emphasis on spiritual equality remained important, while female monastic groups offered an alternative to marriage. Veneration of the Virgin Mary and other female religious figures gave positive role models for women. Still, even though women were less restricted than females within Islam, they lost ground. They were increasingly hemmed

in by male-dominated organizations. By the close of the Middle Ages, patriarchal structures were firmly established.

**The Decline of the Medieval Synthesis.** After 1300 postclassical Western civilization declined. A series of wars embroiled France and England during the 14th and 15th centuries. The sporadic fighting spread economic distress and demonstrated the weaknesses of the feudal order. At the same time, key sources of Western vitality degenerated. Agriculture could not keep up with population growth. Famines followed. Beginning in 1348, the Black Death brought massive mortality. Tensions intensified between landlord and peasants, and artisans and their employees.

**Signs of Strain.** There were increasing challenges to medieval institutions. The landowning aristocracy, the ruling class, lost its military role as professional armies and new weapons transformed warfare. Aristocrats retreated into a ceremonial style of life emphasizing chivalry. The balance of power between church and state shifted in favor of the state. As the church leaders struggled to retain secular authority, they lost touch with individual believers who turned to popular currents emphasizing direct experience of god. Intellectual and artistic synthesis also declined. Church officials became less tolerant of intellectual daring and retreated from Aquinas's blend of rationalism and religion. In art, styles became more realistic.

**The Postclassical West and Its Heritage.** The Middle Ages has been regarded as a backward period between the era of Greece and Rome and the emergence of modern Europe. But the period was at the same time an age of dynamic growth. Significant changes occurred in the relations between Europe and surrounding regions. Europeans benefited from their readiness to incorporate advances made in other civilizations.

**GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: Medieval Europe and the World.** During the earlier centuries Europeans were subject to invasions from Vikings and nomadic peoples. They recognized the superior power of the Islamic world. The Europeans reacted by absorbing influences from other civilizations. As other civilizations weakened, Europeans became more active beyond their home region.

## KEY TERMS

**Middle Ages:** the period in western European history between the fall of the Roman Empire and the 15th century.

**Gothic:** an architectural style developed during the 13th and 14th centuries in western Europe; featured pointed arches and flying buttresses as external support on main walls.

**Vikings:** seagoing Scandinavian raiders who disrupted coastal areas of Europe from the 8th to 11th centuries; pushed across the Atlantic to Iceland, Greenland, and North America. Formed permanent territories in Normandy and Sicily.

**Manorialism:** rural system of reciprocal relations between landlords and their peasant laborers during the Middle Ages; peasants exchanged labor for use of land and protection.

**Serfs:** peasant agricultural laborers within the manorial system.

**Moldboard:** adjunct to the plow introduced in northern Europe during the Middle Ages; permitted deeper cultivation of heavier soils.

**Three-field system:** practice of dividing land into thirds, rotating between two different crops and pasturage—an improvement making use of manure.

**Clovis:** King of the Franks; converted to Christianity circa 496.

**Carolingians:** royal house of Franks from 8th to 10th century.

**Charles Martel:** First Carolingian king of the Franks; defeated Muslims at Tours in 732.

**Charlemagne:** Carolingian monarch who established large empire in France and Germany circa 800.

**Holy Roman emperors:** political heirs to Charlemagne's empire in northern Italy and Germany; claimed title of emperor but failed to develop centralized monarchy.

**Feudalism:** personal relationship during the Middle Ages by which greater lords provided land to lesser lords in return for military service.

**Vassals:** members of the military elite who received land or a benefice from a lord in return for military service and loyalty.

**Capetians:** French dynasty ruling from the 10th century; developed a strong centralized monarchy.

**William the Conqueror:** invaded England from Normandy in 1066; established tight feudal system and centralized monarchy in England.

**Magna Carta:** Great charter issued by King John of England in 1215; represented principle of mutual limits and obligations between rulers and feudal aristocracy, and the supremacy of law.

**Parliaments:** bodies representing privileged groups; institutionalized the principle that kings ruled with the advice and consent of their subjects.

**Hundred Years War:** conflict between England and France (1337–1453).

**Pope Urban II:** organized the first Crusade in 1095; appealed to Christians to free the Holy Land from Muslim control.

**Investiture:** the practice of appointment of bishops; Pope Gregory attempted to stop lay investiture, leading to a conflict with the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV.

**St. Clare of Assisi:** 13th-century founder of a woman's monastic order; represented a new spirit of purity and dedication to the Catholic church.

**Gregory VII:** 11th-century pope who attempted to free church from secular control; quarreled with Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV over practice of lay investiture of bishops.

**Peter Abelard:** Author of *Yes and No*; university scholar who applied logic to problems of theology; demonstrated logical contradictions within established doctrine.

**St. Bernard of Clairvaux:** emphasized role of faith in preference to logic; stressed importance of mystical union with God; successfully challenged Abelard and had him driven from the universities.

**Thomas Aquinas:** creator of one of the great syntheses of medieval learning; taught at University of Paris; author of *Summas*; believed that through reason it was possible to know much about natural order, moral law, and nature of God.

**Scholasticism:** dominant medieval philosophical approach; so-called because of its base in the schools or universities; based on use of logic to resolve theological problems.

**Troubadours:** poets in 14th-century southern France; gave a new value to the emotion of love in Western tradition.

**Hanseatic League:** an organization of north German and Scandinavian cities for the purpose of establishing a commercial alliance.

**Jacques Coeur:** 15th-century French merchant; his career as banker to the French monarchy demonstrates new course of medieval commerce.

**Guilds:** associations of workers in the same occupation in a single city; stressed security and mutual control; limited membership, regulated apprenticeship, guaranteed good workmanship; held a privileged place in cities.

**Black Death:** bubonic plague that struck Europe in the 14th century; significantly reduced Europe's population; affected social structure.