Medieval Church: Roman Catholic Worship

Randy Broberg
Maranatha Chapel
School of Ministry
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Verses to Consider

- Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? …So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.""

- Matt. 15:1-9
Conversions of Pagan Temples and Holidays Continues, 609 AD

- 609--Pagan pantheon in Rome consecrated as church of St. Maria Rotunda.

Our notion of church members going to church every Sunday to worship nearly died out in the Middle Ages.

It was the practice to have a Mass every day.
Gothic Architecture

The development of Gothic structural components were a departure from the Roman principles that had guided most of the Romanesque architects. The Gothic builders took the concepts of the skeletal structure, the pointed vault and the flying buttresses as far as can be taken using stone as the primary building material. The goal was to build a high building reaching toward heaven filled with light. A goal they achieved for their time. Their structural considerations would not be improved until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

St-Denisi (1135-1144)
Prayer

- Bernard of Clairvaux was a mystic in his devotion. He is the author of many hymns as well as devotional books.
- “Oh Sacred Head Now Wounded”

- Prayer and personal sanctity, are the ways to the knowledge of God, and not disputation. The saint, not the disputant, comprehends God.

- 600-- prayers directed to Mary, angels and saints adopted officially
- 1090 Rosary, repetitious praying with beads, invented by Peter the Hermit
- The practice of kneeling or bowing and clasping the hands became common around 1000 AD and was patterned after homage given to feudal lords. Before that time most prayers were offered standing with hands upheld.
Worship of Mary

- Background: Council of Ephesus, 431 AD
- Mary called "God bearer" or "Mother of God" (theotokos).
Belief in immaculate conception of Mary spreads.

The theologian Duns Scotus in the 13th century systematized the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which teaches that Mary was actually conceived without original sin.

Spread of belief in perpetual virginity of Mary, even though there is flat contradiction of it in the Bible. ("his mother and his brothers," etc.)
Worship of Relics

- Constantine's mother Helena "discovering" the "true cross."
- 786 veneration of cross and relics officially authorized
- Relics were credited with miracles.
Example of a sacred reliquary
According to Schaff, there was much principled opposition in the Frankish world, especially Charlemagne, to the superstitious worship of images. But the Eastern view, which was the majority Western view too, prevailed, with the difference that only flat images are allowed in Eastern Orthodoxy while Roman Catholicism allows sculptures also.
Worship of Saints & Angels

- Mass conversions meant converts brought with them into the church their superstitions, gods and practices.
  - Saint Peter, who bore the sword, was viewed as the soldier’s saint.
  - St. Anthony watched out for pigs and pig farmers.
  - St. Gaul looked out for chickens and chicken farmers.
  - St. Apollonia cured toothaches.
  - St. Genevieve cured fevers.
  - St. Blaise cured sore throats.
- 993-95--Saints begin to be officially canonized by the Roman church.
- 1170--Pope Alexander III established rules for the canonization of saints, the same year Thomas Becket is murdered in England. Becket is canonized in 1173.
Arm of a Saint: A Sacred Relic
All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day

- **All Saints’ Day**, Nov 1, commemorating all the saints of the church, known and unknown.
- Pope Boniface (609-610) confirmed All Saints' Day.
- It is celebrated on November 1 in the Western churches and on the first Sunday after Pentecost in the Eastern churches. The first general observance of All Saints' Day was ordered by Pope Gregory IV in 837. In medieval England the festival was called All Hallows, and its eve is still known as Halloween.

- **All Souls’ Day**, Nov 2, commemorating all the Christians believed to be in purgatory.
- First established by Odilo, abbot of Cluny, in the 11th century and was widely celebrated by the 13th century.
- For remembering the souls awaiting release from purgatory. Roman Catholic doctrine holds that the prayers of the faithful on earth will help cleanse these souls in order to prepare them for heaven.
“Chrism” is a mixture of oil of olives and balsam, used in the administration of sacraments.

To be valid, chrism “must consist of pure oil of olives, and it must be blessed by a bishop, or at least by a priest delegated by the Holy See. These two conditions are certainly necessary for validity; moreover it is probable that there should be an admixture of balsam, and that the blessing of the chrism should be special, in the sense that it ought to be different from that which is given to the oil of the sick or the oil of catechumens. If either of the last two conditions is wanting the sacrament will be doubtfully valid.”

*Catholic Encyclopedia*
Medieval Church Music

- 7th Cen. Organs begin to be used in churches. Church bells are used to call people to worship and to give the hours to the monks in the monasteries.
- 8th Cen. Schools for church music are established at Paris, Cologne, Soissin, and Metz.
- In 1015 Pomposa Monastery near Ravenna introduces sight singing. By the middle of the century, polyphonic singing replaces Gregorian Chant, the harp arrives in Europe, and the first German Christmas carol is written.

Medieval Psalter (in vernaculars)
From Chants To Organ Hymns

• “Liturgical music of the Roman Catholic church consisting of unaccompanied melody sung in unison to Latin words.”
• It is named for Pope Gregory I the Great, who may have contributed to its collection and codification.
• It apparently derived principally from Jewish cantillation, with other elements entering from the Eastern Church and elsewhere.
• Chant has traditionally been performed at the mass and the canonical hours (the eight prayer services traditionally held daily in monasteries). Its texts come primarily from the biblical psalms, metrical hymns, and texts specific to the mass and the hours.
Instruments Added to Worship Music: Pipe Organ, Horns and Violins
Odo of Cluny, abbot from 927 to 942, brought the monastery its earliest musical distinction through his active fostering of choral music. Documents tell of more than a hundred psalms being sung there daily in his time; and on his tours of inspection to other monasteries, he devoted much of his energies to the instruction of choirs. His great success made it necessary for his teaching methods to be written down, from which circumstance something about the early status of music at Cluny can be ascertained.

- Odo's great accomplishments include the arranging of the tones of the scale into an orderly progression from A to G; and by thus assigning to them a system of letters, he was responsible for the earliest effective system of Western musical notation.
Liturgical Drama, 10th Cen.

- Religious rites contained theatrical elements, and priests began using these elements during masses. These first short plays were called *tropes*.
- Liturgical dramas were written in Latin and performed by the clergy during church services, when the "Quem quaeritis" ("Whom do you seek") section of the Easter mass was performed as a small scene in the service.
- The plays gradually increased in length, with themes derived from biblical stories (particularly those of Easter and Christmas), and they flourished in the 12th-13th century.
- Their Latin dialogue was frequently chanted to simple melodies.
- *Vernacular* is a term meaning everyday speech. Roman Catholic clergy switched from Latin to the languages of the people they served. As these new plays became more elaborate, they were moved outside the church and involved more actors, so commoners were used as amateur performers.
Development of the Church Calendar

• Regular Sunday church attendance dropped significantly.
• Most common people only attended church on festival days.
• The calendar was full of ceremonies and feast days with traditions and folklore equivalent to what we have for Christmas. It was through these ceremonies, and not scripture reading or preaching, that most common people came to understand what it was to be Christian.
Pilgrimages were undertaken for spiritual advancement, forgiveness of sins and for those in search of miracles of healing promised from holy relics.
Probably the most famous copy of The Canterbury Tales is contained in the 464-page Ellesmere manuscript -- notable in part because of its beautiful marginal illustrations completed around 1410 by an unknown artist.
Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales

Though the son of a wealthy middle-class wine merchant, Chaucer, the poet served three English kings as soldier, ambassador, Justice of the Peace, Member of Parliament, Controller of the port of London, and Clerk of the King’s Works.

This tinted woodcut of Chaucer is based on an illustration in the margin of the famous Ellesmere copy of *The Canterbury Tales*. 
Questions to Consider

• Did the Medieval church spend too much on church buildings?
• Assuming you have a church building, should you build it to glorify God as you would try to glorify God in everything else you do?
• Can a church building’s beauty be a testimony for Christ? Can a building that’s run down, dirty or even ugly be a stumbling block for those who might visit?
• If we had an unlimited budget to build a new “house of worship” what kind of architecture, floor plan and decorations would best fit our faith and doctrine? What would that church building look like?
• When we ask others to pray for us, esp. “pastors” or “elders,” are we saying they can intercede on our behalf? If yes, how does that differ from the Catholic notion of the intercession of saints?
• If a pastor can pray for you now, in this life, is he prevented from praying for you again when he is in heaven?
• Must we be extremely “Puritan” in our rejection of art in church buildings? Is all art bad in such a location?
• Is art o.k. outside the church building? If yes, what’s the difference?