

(Please note: accompanying powerpoint presentation available on website)

## Medieval Church

### Introduction

**Medieval period** usually taken from date of Fall of Rome (410) or Council of Chalcedon (451) through to beginnings of Reformation (1517) – some overlaps

= **Complex and colourful 1000-year period** (can only offer selective ‘cameos’ in time available)

### Main themes:

- **Barbarian invasions/migrations >>> collapse**
- **Mission and re-Christianisation** (Patrick and A-lo-pen)
- **Papal Dominance** (Gregory VII and Innocent III)
- **New forms of spirituality** (Francis of Assisi)
- **Moves towards reformation** (John Wyclif)

### Preface: Barbarian Invasions/migrations >>> collapse

- Barbarian invasions = sustained pressure on settled societies (Roman empire)  
**Map**
- Barbarians generally not destructive (despite name “Vandals”): wanted to be part of civilised society, but didn’t know how to make it work >>> decay and disintegration
- Because of population movements, **re-Christianisation** needed (= rebuilding and new expansion)

### **1. Celtic Missions in the West: Patrick in Ireland (389-461)**

- **Scottish** monk – taken captive as 16-year-old boy and enslaved in Ireland for 6 years; escapes to Continent; studies and later returns to Scotland. Hears voices from Irish coast: “We beseech you, man of God, come and walk again among us”; returns to Ireland about 430CE >>> sets up Monastery of Armagh, builds upon remnant pockets of Christianity
- **Celtic Christianity different in style from that found elsewhere:**
  - Ireland never part of Roman Empire
  - Celtic Christianity based on early (i.e. Greek) traditions; Emphasis on learning
  - Ireland not urban (no towns or cities); Celtic Christianity organised around [rural] monasteries, rather than [urban] diocese
  - Key force of missionary expansion = wandering (*xeneia* [foreignness] in search of personal holiness)
  - Goals: Worship of God and furthering of personal Holiness; monastery set up for worship of God, surrounding territories ‘christianised’ from these
  - Example of Celtic spirituality: ‘St. Patrick’s Breastplate’ (**Handout Cameo 1**)

- Other key figures in **early Celtic expansion**:
  - **Columba** (521-596): establishes monastery of island of **Iona** off west coast of Scotland (563). Many daughter monasteries established from Iona, esp. **Lindisfarne** in Northumbria (Aidan, 634); **Columban** (543-615): Leaves Ireland 573, establishes monasteries in Luxeuil, Eastern France. Daughter monasteries in Switzerland and Northern Italy.
  - But **Roman missions to Britain also underway; began at Canterbury in 596** >>> **expansion northwards** [= urban-based, relied on patronage of rulers] (**Map**)
  - **Confrontation with Roman missions** (Oswy, king of Northumbria had been converted to Celtic Christianity; his wife had been brought up as a Roman Christian – different practices; especially dating of Easter and Lenten fasting/feasting!)
  - (Synod of Whitby 664): Outcomes:
    - **Amalgamation of missions (Celtic ‘fire’ // Roman organisation) – more effective in long-term**
    - **Partnership with rulers** (enforce ‘conversions’) – who benefits? (rulers or church?)
    - **Anglo-Saxon culture** (especially in scholarship of Northumbrian monasteries): Manuscripts etc. **Examples**
    - **Preservation of ‘soul’ of Europe in monasteries**

## **2. Nestorian Missions: A-lo-pen in China (c.600[?]-after 650)**

- Record of Nestorian mission in China set out on **Hsian-fu monument** (erected 781, rediscovered 1623). This records that A-lo-pen, a Syrian (or possibly Persian) Nestorian missionary bishop arrived in Chang-An (T’ang imperial capital) in 635 as honoured guest (already in Khotan; possibly part of an official tribute embassy from Khotan in South-western Tarim Basin [Xinjiang]) (**Map**)
- The monument records that A-lo-pen brought **Christian texts with him and that these were translated in the Imperial Library** and examined by the Emperor T’ai-Tsung himself. (**Handout Cameo 3**)
- **T’ang dynasty highly educated and uniquely open to influences from West** // Nestorian monasticism characterised by missionary zeal, scholarship and learning. (= exceptional conjunction of opportunity!!)
- Emperor orders building of monastery for A-lo-pen and his fellow monks in 638 – commissioned to translate and distribute Christian texts >>> **200 years of Nestorian activity in China. >>> Tibet, Korea and Japan**
- After 845, Christians expelled, but Emperor’s telling story of Noah to 2 Arab visitors (851) >>> Christian remnants in Northern China (Marco Polo)

## **3. Papal Dominance: Gregory VII in Rome (pope 1073-1085) >>> Innocent III (pope 1198-1216)**

- Church Reform begins under Pope Leo IX (1048-1054) and Emperor Henry III (1039-1056) [partnership] = **operational reforms (cleaning up way things**

**are done**): reality of Church did not match theory: Church under control of aristocratic lay proprietors, rather than partnership Church/Kings (scope for corruption)

- **Move to remove lay control of church (1059): who has the right to appoint bishops and popes?** Traditional practice = selection by lords, dukes and king >>> corruption and '**simony**' (from Simon Magus purchasing gift of Spirit in Acts 8)
- 1075: Pope Gregory VII bans bestowal of ring and pastoral staff on bishop by lay lords (direct challenge to established social convention)
- **1076: Conflict Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV** (Gregory suspends group of imperially-appointed German bishops; Henry responds in letter of defiance charging Gregory with usurpation of Papal office – because not appointed by kings) (**Handout Cameo 3a**)
- **Gregory responds with statement of Papal authority; removes Henry's right to rule, absolves all Christians of obedience to Henry, and excommunicates him (Handout Cameo 3b)**
- Henry = defence of traditional social order; Gregory = independence of church from secular control
- Outcomes:
  - Henry deposed (new Emperor elected)
  - **Henry desperate to regain power; goes to Canossa to beg forgiveness – waits 3 days barefoot in snow (Gregory lifts Henry's excommunication)**  
**Picture**
  - Canossa a highly symbolic image = humiliation of German Emperor by Pope (but who really won? Actually, Henry, because Canossa bought him time to rebuild authority >>> eventually invades Italy and imprisons Gregory)
- Significance: “who has the right to ordain bishops?”; but long-term = important step in development of medieval papacy (= political, as well as spiritual, entity)
- **Pinnacle of Papal power reached under Innocent III (pope 1198-1216):** claims unique authority as ‘Vicar of Christ’
  - Innocent III claimed right to set aside any human actions (since these were contaminated by sin, and therefore came under his spiritual competence) – could veto political decisions of kings etc.
  - Brilliant and skilful diplomatic skills (**able to control all of Europe, with single exception of England** (= conflict between King John and barons >>> Magna Charta)
  - **Innocent III made use of papal interdict to enforce his will (Handout Cameo 3c)**

#### **4. New forms of Spirituality: St Francis of Assisi in Italy (1182-1226)**

- Francis (John Bernadone [Italian]; nickname = ‘Frenchman’): high-spirited, generous and popular

- Converted in early 20s (several stages: religious trance/exchange clothes with beggar/care of lepers) >>> preaches gospel to poor >>> Founded Franciscan Order 1209
- Key = poverty, supported by begging (marriage to “Lady Poverty”; “to naked follow the naked Christ”)
- Nature of Franciscan spirituality:
  - Fundamental step = vow of complete poverty (but joyful!)
  - Wholehearted embrace of world as God’s creation (‘Song of Brother Sun’)
  - Humility and modesty: Fratres Minores = ‘Little Brothers’
  - Piety directed towards spiritual/charitable ends >>> mission
- Effects of Franciscan spirituality:
  - Idealistic desire for Christian spirituality: **imitation of Christ** (note stigmata) = ‘Jesus Movement’ of 13<sup>th</sup> century; served/inspired society (Prayer of Saint Francis – **Handout Cameo 4**)
  - Met religious hunger of the time >>> changed ways spirituality was pursued
  - But was it ‘too good to last’? Francis losing control of movement by 1220
  - Movement splits after Francis’ death (1226) >>> ‘Spirituals’ and ‘Conventuals’
  - Franciscans (males); Poor Clares (females); Tertiaries (part-time friars)

### **5. Moves towards Reformation: John Wyclif in England (1330-1384)**

- Wyclif = theologian in University of Oxford; employed by the Prince of Wales
- Although Wyclif’s views ‘heretical’, protected by influence of employer; not burnt at stake (as would have been expected)
- Wyclif’s ideas on reform (= “Morning-Star of the Reformation”):
  - **Opposed lack of Scriptural understanding (Handout Cameo 5a)**; also ministry not dependent on formal ordination >>> translated Latin Vulgate Bible into English >>> provides impetus for influence of Scripture >>> Lollards (“mutterers” = two-by-two preaching)>>> paved way for Lutheran reformation
  - **More importantly**, Wyclif observed that if a State official fell, it was the duty of the Church to correct him. But what if the Pope was to fall – who was to correct him? **It was therefore the duty of the State to correct the Church** [this idea formed a key plank in Luther’s program of reform]
  - Wyclif’s influence minimal in England, but his ideas influential on the Continent, especially in Bohemia at the University of Prague (Jan Hus - popularised Wyclif’s ideas >>> first **successful** Reformation)
  - **Died 1384 – body later exhumed, burnt and ashes cast into stream** (but influence continued! **Handout Cameo 5b**)

# **(HANDOUT) Medieval Church 12 September 2010**

## **1. Celtic Missions**

### **Cameo 1: Patrick (389-461)**

#### **‘St Patrick’s Breastplate’ – the *Caim* or ‘Encircling Prayer’ of Patrick**

I bind unto myself today  
The strong Name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me for ever.  
By power of faith, Christ's incarnation;  
His baptism in the Jordan river;  
His death on Cross for my salvation;  
His bursting from the spiced tomb;  
His riding up the heavenly way;  
His coming at the day of doom;  
I bind unto myself today.

....

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

...’

From ‘Saint Patrick’s “Breastplate” Prayer’, (full text of prayer at [http://prayerfoundation.org/st\\_patricks\\_breastplate\\_prayer.htm](http://prayerfoundation.org/st_patricks_breastplate_prayer.htm))

**Lindisfarne Gospels:** Online searchable version available at the British Library site at <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/lindisfarne.html>. Click on the ‘turning the pages’ link at the right; the Lindisfarne Gospels are the third site on the screen.

## **2. Nestorian Missions**

### **Cameo 2: A-lo-pen (c.600[?]-after 650)**

#### **Hsian-fu Monument (erected 781)**

‘At the time of T’ai Tsung, cultured Emperor,  
Whose shining glory opened a propitious age,  
Who was an enlightened Sage over his people,  
**In Syria there was a Bishop named A-lo-pen.**  
**Divining the bright clouds [of the eastern sky] he conveyed the true**  
**Scriptures,**

**Regarding the music of the wind, he rode through hardship and danger.**

**In the ninth year of Cheng-kuan [635CE] he arrived at Ch'ang-An.**

The Emperor sent the Chancellor, Duke Fang Hsuan-ling,

To lead an escort to the Western Suburb,

And received him as a guest in the Palace.

**The Scriptures were translated in the Royal Library,**

**And their doctrine examined in the [Emperor's] Private Apartments.**

**Knowing well that it was right and true,**

**The Emperor expressly commanded its propagation.'**

*Christian Monument at Ch'ang-An*, lines 81-94, cited in William G. Young, *Handbook of Source Materials for Students of Church History, up to 650SAFD* (Madras: 1969), p.32.

### **3. Papal Dominance**

#### **Cameo 3: Gregory VII (Pope 1073-1085)**

##### **a. King Henry IV's letter to Pope Gregory VII (24 January 1076)**

**'Henry, king not through usurpation but through the holy ordination of God to Hildebrand [i.e. Gregory VII], at present not pope but false monk....** Not only hast thou not feared to lay hands on the rulers of the holy church, the anointed of the Lord – the archbishops, namely, bishops and priests – but thou hast trodden them under foot like slaves ignorant of what their master is doing.... **Thou...hast not, accordingly, shunned to rise up against the royal power conferred upon us by God, daring to threaten to divest us of it. As if we had received our kingdom from thee! As if the kingdom and the empire were in thine and not in God's hand!** And this, although Our Lord Jesus Christ did call us to the kingdom, he did not, however, call thee to the priesthood.... [Henry goes on to accuse Gregory of **simony**, i.e. of purchasing the papal office.]....

I, Henry, king by the grace of God, do say to thee, together with all our bishops:  
**Descend, descend, to be damned throughout the ages.'**

##### **b. Pope Gregory's reply to King Henry IV (22 February 1076)**

'...Especially to me, as thy [i.e. St. Peter's] representative and by thy favour, has the power been granted by God of binding and loosing in Heaven and on earth. On the strength of this belief, therefore, ... in the name of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, **I withdraw, through thy power and authority, from Henry the king, ... who has risen against thy church with unheard of insolence, the rule over the whole kingdom of the Germans and over Italy. And I absolve all Christians from the bonds of the oath which they have made or shall make to him; and I forbid any one to serve him as king.**... I bind him in thy stead with the chain of the anathema [i.e. excommunication].'

Cited in Brian Tierney, *The Middle Ages*, Vol.1 Sources of Medieval History (New York: 1992), pp.146-147

##### **c. Innocent III (pope 1198-1216): Notes re Excommunication and Interdict**

**'Excommunication** or the threat of excommunication was the first weapon.

Catholics believe salvation depends on perpetual sacramental observance. Cutting a communicant off from the sacraments means one loses salvation. One writer

stated: While under excommunication, persons could not act as judge, juror, witness, or attorney. They could not be guardians, executors, or parties to contract. After death, they received no Christian burial, and if, by chance, they were buried in consecrated ground, the church had their bodies disinterred and destroyed.

When the pope excommunicated a believer there was really "no hope."

The **interdict** served as the pope's second weapon. Some scholars call it an "ecclesiastical lockout." **What excommunication was to individuals, the interdict was to an entire nation.** A papal interdict suspended all public worship and withdrew the sacraments. After the interdict went into effect, Citizens usually pressured their rulers to repent or abdicate. Occasionally citizens overthrew their rulers. **Pope Innocent III utilized or threatened interdicts 85 times during his papacy.**'

'The Medieval Papacy',

[http://www.christianchronicler.com/history1/medieval\\_papacy.html](http://www.christianchronicler.com/history1/medieval_papacy.html)

#### **4. New forms of Spirituality**

##### **Cameo 4: St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)**

###### **Prayer of St Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy,

O divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Amen.

'Prayer of Saint Francis', [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer\\_of\\_Saint\\_Francis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_of_Saint_Francis). See also Francis of Assisi, 'Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon', at The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=183>.

#### **5. Moves towards Reformation**

##### **Cameo 5. John Wyclif (1330-1384)**

'Christian men and women, old and young, should study well in the New Testament, for it is of full authority, and open to understanding by simple men, as to the points that are most needful to salvation. Each part of Scripture, both open and dark, teaches meekness and charity; and therefore he that keeps meekness and charity has the true understanding and perfection of all Scripture. Therefore, no

simple man of wit should be afraid to study in the text of Scripture. **And no cleric should be proud of the true understanding of Scripture, because understanding of Scripture without charity that keeps God's commandments, makes a man deeper damned ... and pride and covetousness of clerics is the cause of [the Church's] blindness and heresy, and deprives them of the true understanding of Scripture.'**

'In order to the existence of such a ministry in the Church, there is requisite an authority received from God, and consequently power and knowledge imparted from God for the exercise of such ministry; and **where a man possesses these, although the bishop has not laid hands upon him according to his traditions, God has Himself appointed him.'**

'Famous Quotes by John Wycliffe', [http://www.bookrags.com/quotes/John\\_Wycliffe](http://www.bookrags.com/quotes/John_Wycliffe)

Although Wyclif died in 1384, his body was later exhumed, burned and his ashes cast into a nearby stream. Thomas Fuller wrote:

'They burnt his ashes and cast them into Swift, a neighbouring brook running nearby. Thus this brook hath conveyed his ashes into [the river] Avon, Avon into [the river] Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed the world over.'

Cited in Elgin S. Moyer, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Chicago: 1951), p.294.