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*"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)*

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## THE CHURCH in the MIDDLE AGES

by Otto Scott

Otto Scott is an historian, a writer, and staff member of the Chalcedon Foundation. This essay is from a speech he delivered in 1992 at the Tenth Anniversary F.A.C.S. conference.

The early Church gradually replaced the civic institutions of Rome. Rome's decline made the rise of a new religion possible. We are dealing with subjects of the greatest complexity and sweep, and all we can do is to touch upon their outlines.

The slow decline of a great Empire and the unprecedented rise of a new one that emerged during that decline, is not a subject that can be fully described in a single essay. But it is possible to look at a few points.

The Roman civilization, like all civilizations, originally had a strong religion of its own, but its economy was based upon the victories of its armies. At its peak it was a military dictatorship that governed a network of city-states. These city-states inherited the traditions and culture of Greece, and were essentially urban.

Rome's military conquests remained restricted to the Mediterranean until Caesar and Augustus, who expanded the empire into Gaul, to the Danube, southern Germany and the Rhineland. For roughly 400 years Central and Western Europe was successively Romanized in a manner that altered every aspect of life. Urbanization was introduced into Europe, and the army was its major vehicle. Various cities, still in existence, such as Cologne and Merida were created, including York in England and Mainz in Germany. Some were created by Roman veterans who settled; others were

located in Celtic tribal communities and pressed into Italian municipal models. A stairstep of communities was created that ranged from the barbaric tribes up to provincial cities with Latin rights of citizenship. The task of civilizing the savage tribes began, therefore, with Rome, which transformed client states into provinces, provincial cities into colonies and colonials into citizens.

Each city was a religious and political center. And because land was the basis of wealth, freemen bought land, which made them eligible for political office. The central government was available for loans to buy land at low interest. There were also welfare programs to assist poor parents and orphans. Rome was the first welfare state.

The leaders had not only a town house but a rural estate with overseers and slaves. In Britain and northern France the city was mainly an administrative, or office center (much as they are becoming among us today), and many citizens lived largely on their estates. But their culture was part of the regular urban civilization Rome had evolved, with their baths and central heating and mosaic floors.<sup>1</sup> Some of these estates in Northern France and Belgium endured even through barbarian invasion and still bear their old Roman names.

The urbanization of the Roman civilization, however, was largely a surface

phenomenon. It was never completely assimilated by the native populations. It was essentially a civilization of the leisure class, somewhat like ours today, consisting of urban bourgeoisie and their dependants. Unproductive programs of social engineering, as we call it, kept increasing. This increasingly strained the resources of the government. Every new city, said one historian, meant the creation of a new hive of drones, or bureaucrats.

The fact is there were inherent limitations in the Roman economy, which was based upon conquest. As long as it was expanding, it was fine. Each conquest brought in more slaves and commodities. But because Romans remained bound to the land they could not convert these commodities and people into industries. Once the conquests stopped, the system began to contract, the resources of the empire began to dwindle, and the government was obliged to raise taxes. The city aristocracy, which provided the unpaid magistrates and administrators — who were responsible for collecting taxes — were gradually ruined.

That left the army, which was too efficient to simply let rust. Its leaders were half soldiers and half politicians. For a long time its benefits were so numerous it remained obedient, but in time the system of games and welfare produced a population unsuitable for military service. Except for the Praetorian Guard, Italians no longer served and the army became provincial throughout the empire. It grew into a separate class, and drew from a lower social stratum. It was gradually governed by Centurions, with an aristocratic overlay. The Empire gradually lost the rule of law, and became a pure military despotism. By the third century civil wars once again racked the system.

The Caesars became men from the army who had risen from the ranks: sergeant majors. They levied enormous taxes and simultaneously debased the currency. Taxes and inflation, in other words, carried the situation from bad to worse. The government fell back on compulsory

1. Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1953).



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Editor: Ian Hodge

services and conscription, and finally to rationing. This led to the rise of class conflict, in which the army was seen as an instrument of justice against the rich. This was strengthened by the fact that the new army was led by men of peasant background.

All this led to the inflexible and arbitrary rules of the bureaucracies. The Emperors became like the Pharaohs: unquestionable as long as they lasted. Rome drifted into the State Socialism of Egypt, where everything was nationalized; where the Government owned everything, and the citizens nothing. Diocletian incorporated this system into the Roman, including hereditary guilds, universal service and a bureaucratic unitary government. He changed the army, created minor emperors in various parts and in effect reduced Rome from the center to one of the branches. Constantine completed this reform by converting to Christianity and creating a new capital, on the ground that Rome was no longer a true center.

The rise of Christianity inside the Roman Empire during its devolution can only be explained as the emergence of a spiritual force. Its origins were in the one group of people who had resisted all the religious influences that surrounded them: the Jews. The early Church claimed its inheritance from the Hebraic tradition of the Law and the Prophets. It preserved the ideal of spiritual segregation that separated it from the welter of Oriental and pagan religions that seeped throughout the Roman Empire during the three centuries of Christian struggle.

### The Fall of Rome

Christianity grew under oppression; every Christian lived in peril of his life. It had to ward off not only the Government, but competing religions. The mystery religions of Asia Minor, the Egyptian worship of Isis, the Syrian cults of Adonis, and even new religions like Manichaeism, and new forms of the Babylonian astral theology.

In the process of these theological struggles, the Christians grew versed in argument, in persuasion, and in political manouver. But they did not survive by argument and manouver alone: they survived by *organization*.

From the start Christianity regarded itself as the New Israel. As the Apostle Peter said, "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart" (I Peter 2:9). Its leaders were not selected from the community but by God. Its elders were regarded as descendants of the Apostles. The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians in the year 96 A.D. argued that order is the law of the universe. The faithful must preserve the same order and discipline and subordination of rank that marked the Roman army.<sup>2</sup>

As the Roman system deteriorated, the superior discipline and spirit of the Christians grew in power and influence. The power and prestige of the Christian clergy increased as the prestige and influence of the Roman bureaucracy declined, until the Christian bishop became the most important figure in the community.

Constantine's conversion in 313 was the first occasion when a great ruler recognized the superiority of Christianity as a social as well as a religious force. The repeated charge by anti-Christians that Christianity destroyed Rome is a canard; without Christianity Rome would have fallen into the dust that has smothered Ninevah and Babylon.

Constantine's shift of the Empire's capital to Constantinople was a stupendous move, as was his sponsorship of the great ecumenical debates that have since become known as Synods. These were the "first representative deliberative assemblies ever created" and serve as enduring examples of the freedom that Christianity brought to a cruel, dark and despotic system.

There has never, so far as I know, ever been so strange a development as Constantine's acceptance of a new religion in a civilization as old as the Roman, and the subsequent acceptance of that change by large numbers

## Education: Free and Compulsory

by Ian Hodge

The debate over "public" education continues unabated. Public education in this context means education controlled by the political state — state education.

In Australia and elsewhere, education of this kind is on the decline. The glue that held it together has come unstuck. Its purpose, wrong from the start, has never achieved its goal. Now, after over a century of statist education, people are beginning to look for alternatives.

This should not be surprising. A century ago, society was far more homogenous than it is now. At that time it was easier to get people to agree on the idea of state education, free and compulsory. Since its commencement was largely driven by warring Christian factions, Protestant and Catholic, who did not want the other to have a special advantage in receiving favours from the state, the public school, where all religious differences were to be ignored, seemed like a good alternative.

But life changes. So do societies, and so do the people making up those societies. Australia is now a mixed society, with many cultures. And the more the public schools try to hide these differences — the things that make other peoples and societies unique — the more there is bound to be a reaction against the schools.

Not only are there cultural differences to contend with, but the public school must wrestle with other factors which militate against it. An increasing orthodoxy among Christians, and a re-awakening by parents to their God-ordained duty to ensure their children receive a *Christian* education — that's one where Christ is at the centre of *every* subject — has caused many to depart from the public school system.

Other social factors work against the success of the public school as it was conceived. The more influence feminists, homosexuals and others have in the public school, the more people want alternatives, where their offspring are not influenced by ideas which the parents do not accept.

The increasing social breakdown of the family creates great divisions. The rise of public welfare has made parents rely on the state rather than children. Simultaneously, this has allowed



of Romans. Christianity, in fact, almost immediately became fashionable.

Eusebius commented on "the hypocrisy of people who crept into the church" to curry favor with the Emperor. Religion could become a vehicle of power. On a higher level, however, Christianity's first effect was to halt human sacrifice by the Roman government.

That practise, which Lord Acton described in an essay that is seldom mentioned, had continued under every Emperor up to Constantine. It was revived, briefly, by Julian the Apostate, Constantine's nephew, who briefly inherited power, but sank again — never to reappear in Roman civilization.

I mention this not only because it was one of the first great societal benefits that Christianity brought to the world, but one that is never mentioned by anti-Christians or, for that matter, by Christians. And that's amazing, because human sacrifice had been a part of every other religion from time immemorial.

Another change was to create a transitional period in the dying Roman civilization; a transition from paganism to Christianity. A hundred years after Eusebius suspected the conversions of so many, Augustine discussed what he called the "'feigned' Christians driven into his congregation by social pressures and legal compulsion."<sup>3</sup>

By the 400s Christianity had become the religion of virtually all educated Romans, but Rome as a civilization continued to decline. In 410 the city was invaded and sacked by Alaric and his Visigoths; in 411 Augustine, tremendously affected by this illustration of the brevity of earthly power, wrote his *City of God*.

The sack of Rome by Alaric in 410 marks, for me, the beginning of the Middle Ages.

Rome, despite its decline after Constantine's departure, had become the symbol of not only the old civilization, but all civilization for the West. Rome did not vanish, however, it lingered in a sort of twilight. In fact, it was to never completely die, or even fade away. Its symbols remain among us today; its admirers are legion.

During its long transition, many of the Romans continued their customary festivals while calling themselves Christians. Many shocked their bishops by dancing in church, getting drunk at celebrations in the cemeter-

ies, consulting magicians and using charms against illness and misfortune.

Many Christians began to turn toward ascetism in reaction, Monastic communities came into being. What threatened to become a new elite was diverted when Benedict (550) launched the monastic community into helping ordinary people. This was a slow development, but in the end an immensely important one. Meanwhile Christianity introduced a new estimation of marriage, elevated the role of women to equal partnership with their husbands based upon mutual affection and respect: a definition that broke with Greek and Roman precedent.

At the same time Christians became the best Romans in the remaining Empire for it became *their* Empire after Constantine. Heresy became a sort of treason; Christianity became the natural home of the Empire. This transition, the result of three centuries of persistent gaining of respect against all odds, all pressures, all ridicule, all danger, all cruelty, is one of the most remarkable and least mentioned triumphs of all time. How poorly history is taught!

The change in Christian fortunes was accompanied by great strides in doctrinal clarification. From around 430 the debate regarding the human and divine natures of Jesus were resolved at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. And while such clarifications were underway, Christian scholars trained in Roman schools of rhetoric and literature out-argued the pagans.

The Church organization had, from the start, taken form inside the urban communities where Christianity first took root. The Council of Nicea (325) approved of a network of bishoprics headed by a metropolitan bishop, roughly paralleling the old Roman administrative structure. Meanwhile, Christians slowly became acclimated to their situation. To move from persecution to favor is hardly a simple matter.

This involved going public, as it were, with the Christian past. Martyrs, previously unmentioned publicly, became the subject of literature and, despite laws against disturbing the dead — of relics. Corpses of saints were moved into city churches, established in new and splendid settings, enshrined under altars. Cults, such as appeals to the first martyr, Stephen, began to spread with astonishing speed.

children to be more selfish and accept less responsibility for their parents. The public school itself is a major contributor to this kind of problem. Children, for example, learn their duties and obligations better when they mix with and learn from their elders. The philosophy of the public school, however, is to have all children learn from their peers. Thus, ignorant children influence each other. Little wonder that we have a problem on our hands. And considering that children are kept this way until well into their late teens or beyond, we have every reason for concern. The result is a fragmentation of society — a fragmentation that encourages private schools rather than public ones.

When you add to this a philosophic dilemma so great that public school educators by and large no longer know how to educate, then it is easy to predict the future of the public schools.

Private schools are on the increase. And the more the defenders of public education try to stop the haemorrhage the greater the flow out of the public schools.

In this climate the Christian community has a unique opportunity to position itself. It alone, of all the belief systems known to man, is able to solve the problem of knowledge. Recognising that God is the Author of *all* truth, the Christian is able to grow in knowledge and understanding in a way that is unattainable by those who do not share the same belief. This is the story of Western man. The early monks had a very strong emphasis on education, and the monasteries they built served as learning centres that changed barbarous tribes into civilised Christian communities.

Today, many recognise that the barbarians are at the gate again. This should not be unexpected, since the religious beliefs which eliminated savagery and idolatrous practices are held in low esteem in most countries around the world. However, rather than seeing this as a time of despair and frustration, we should instead see it as a time of golden opportunity. For in this climate the Gospel has proven itself, that it can indeed transform the lives, not just of individuals, but of whole societies. Not that the Gospel needs to prove itself. But if we want the visible proof of what can be done, then we have history on our side.

A knowledge of history will not change the world. But it can, and does, give us confidence that our labour will not be in vain. The future belongs to those who see the opportunities at hand, who grasp those opportunities



The Christian sacred history began to appear. The church became a microcosm of the heavenly kingdom; to enter was to enter a world separated from the mundane, focused on the eternal. To walk in a great basilica was to repeat the journey of salvation. Christians developed a network of their own sacred places, and the great city squares, once heavy with pagan memories, were transformed by the erection of churches and even welfare stations.

Pilgrimages, especially to holy places were organized, and new liturgies appeared where the dead were asked to pray for the living, in a reversal of ancient practises.

### The Expansion of Christianity

Meanwhile, having overcome the Roman world, Christians began to look toward the immense, pagan and hostile Germanic world. By the time of Gregory the Great, Pope from 590 to 604, the cultivated world of pagan Rome had receded into the distant past. There was an enormous drop in general living standards as the economy of the Empire completely collapsed. But the problem of reconciling pagan practises with Christian could be administratively handled, as, for instance, when Gregory ruled that English converts might continue to use their traditional places of worship provided they were sprinkled with holy water. This meant a lot for future missionary activity.<sup>4</sup>

After 500, the greater proportion of the Christian people of western Europe were no longer answering to an Emperor. By 600 A.D. only parts of Italy still acknowledged him. The Germanic areas had their own kings and new forms of government and new political institutions. But overall, horizons had narrowed. Local matters assumed new importance because the Empire was gone, much as the dissolution of the former USSR has allowed the destinies of Georgia and Armenia and other former vassals to re-emerge.

In this new, localised network of communities linked by a transcendental faith and clergy, Bishops and the military shared power. The Bishops gradually assumed authority over parish priests, and his activities included bringing surrounding rustics to the faith, to extend Christian ceremonies, to preach, to oversee pastoral care — and to guard the shrines.

This is often described by secular historians as some sort of oppression, when in fact the shared faith actually

created a community that embraced all classes. This not only enabled the slow process of renewal, but enabled the West to survive even in the face of barbarian enmity.

The Bishops' efforts to expand Christianity were assisted in this period by wandering holy men: monks and preachers and wonder workers, as they were known. The work of monks in particular was crucial in spreading Christianity, especially in areas that lacked towns, such as Gaul, England and Ireland. Many of the Bishops were monks.

The parts of Europe that lay beyond the Christian enclaves were not anxious to be converted: they had their own gods, their own history, and their own customs. These were not gentle: the Franks were still indulging in human sacrifice after the death of Clovis in 511. A Byzantine historian remarked of the Franks at this period that 'although they have become Christians, they still keep the greater part of their ancient religion.'<sup>5</sup>

Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* or the Venerable Bede's of the English people reveals a culture where the new and the traditional were mingled. Its no easy matter to change one's religion: there were deep fears of the old gods and doubts of the new. One of the many historical mysteries that cloud our understanding of human effort is the origin of the tribes that inhabited Europe in the early Middle Ages. We have no idea of where these tens of thousands of people originated, all with their separate languages, laws, customs, gods and methods of warfare and subsistence. All we know is they came somewhere from the north.

We do know, however, that all of them held slaves and all of them conducted human sacrifices as part of their religions. Their attitudes toward slaves were that they were equal with sheep or cattle; beings with no moral value. Sub-humans, as it were. To sacrifice a slave meant no more — and no less, certainly — than to sacrifice a bullock.

It must not be forgotten that such sacrifices were religious in nature, and made either in fear of the gods, or as a penalty for sin. Sacrifice was a bargain, in which a gift was offered in exchange for forgiveness or forbearance, and sometimes for assistance.

It would be a digression to go into these matters in more detail. Our interest is in how the Christian Church after

not for themselves, but for God's glory and the extension of the Kingdom of God.

May God grant each one of us the wisdom to see the world we're in, to recognise His place in the universe, and the courage to move forward to conquer. In this, the Christian family, the Christian school, and Christian education will have a unique and wonderful place.

\* \* \* \*

## Throw Out the TV?

Television has come in for a lot of criticism over the years. It wastes time, redirects people from doing really important things, and has dubious educational value. On the other hand, the power of the visual in learning is very great and cannot be ignored.

Some penetrating comments about television have been:

### Television and Education

"As an educational instrument television has turned out to be roughly on a par with the dullest of old-style schoolmasters or the most vapid of progressive educationalists. Much of the time it manages to combine the spuriousness of the second with the tedium of the former. Its real genius of course is as a baby-sitter, in which capacity it performs the dual role of pacifying the restless natives while persuading their tribal elders that the programs fulfil the missionary task of civilising and educating them. . . .

"Tele-addiction has one possible side-effect which is not often discussed: it may tend to cause parents to lose confidence in their own capacity as teachers. Children learn far more at home than they do at school, not in the formal sense, but in what they pick up incidentally from conversation and as a by-product of other family activities." (Alan Tapper, *The Family in the Welfare State*, Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1990, p. 229.)

### Television and Faith

"Of all the inventions of our time it is likely to prove the most destructive. Whereas nuclear power can only reduce us and our world to a cinder, the camera grinds us down to spiritual dust so fine that a puff of wind scatters it, leaving nothing behind." (Malcolm Muggeridge, *New Statesman*, June 21, 1968.)

"My concern today is [television's] success in sidelining the soldiers of

4. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 89.



the fall of Rome managed to evangelize and convert a Europe where they were greatly outnumbered by tribes whose fierceness is still, hardly ever, mentioned.

Historians seldom cite what Lord Acton proved:<sup>6</sup> that the Romans, like the Greeks, practised human sacrifice up to the time of Constantine. Christianity was the first religion to argue that all souls are equally valuable in the eyes of God, and that Jesus was the last sacrifice.

In the early Middle Ages the Christian survivors of the Roman empire had to confront and convert the Teutons who sacrificed prisoners, the Pannonians who would sacrifice and eat their prisoners, the Getae, who buried widows with their husbands, and the Heruili, who did the same. The Saxons, considered the most cruel of the German tribes, murdered every tenth prisoner and Rhadagisus, a Saxon leader, sacrificed a Christian a day.

Even while conversions were being attempted by the Church in the early Middle Ages there were Christians who sold their serfs to the pagans of the Baltic for sacrifice. That practise was specifically mentioned in Charlemagne's Capitularies as a capital crime; so was the refusal to accept baptism. Charlemagne had a simple philosophy: be baptized or be killed. A lot of people were baptized!

The missionaries did not consider the pagan Gods to be myths: they considered them to be infernal spirits. That is one reason they built altars and churches on the sites where pagan Gods had been worshipped. The Northmen held out the longest. In 893 the Jarl of the Orkneys sacrificed the son of the King of Norway. And the Swedes sometimes sacrificed their own Kings. In Denmark nine victims were sacrificed every ninth year until the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>7</sup> Similar practises were prevalent in Estonia, among the ancient Prussians, among the Celts of Ireland and Spain and among the Franks and Gauls. Most of Europe was hostile to Christianity.

### The Not-So-Dark Middle Ages

**W**e haven't space to properly honor the leaders of the centuries of conversion. Let it suffice to say that it consumed the lifetimes of successive generations, and was conducted amid wars, famines, storms and the struggles of life. Agriculture was trans-

formed and cities built, learning was recovered and expanded, languages refined, and the Latin language retained for international scholars.

During the eighth and ninth centuries the Church helped develop the religious and moral responsibilities of the ruler. This was a tremendous accomplishment and eventually led to the royal government.

Bede's history, for instance, shows there wasn't really much difference between the pagan Penda of Mercia and the Christian Oswald of Northumbria as rulers. Both were marauding tribal war leaders. But by the late eighth century Germanic kings began to think more highly — especially Charlemagne, King of the Franks, crowned the Holy Roman Emperor at Rome in 800 A.D.

In this it is necessary to point out that the Bible consists of two Testaments. And in this respect, the Old Testament played a vital role in reconciling Germanic society and Christianity.

Charlemagne thought of himself as a New David, the war leaders of the Israelites, and also the builder of the Temple at Jerusalem. He also compared himself to Josiah, the Jewish king who attacked idolatry and reformed the religious worship of Israel. . . . Later rulers extended Charlemagne's Old Testament concepts. Alfred in England compared himself to Moses.<sup>8</sup>

Charlemagne echoed the religious writing and arguments of the Venerable Bede and others, who constantly preached about the duties and obligations of being a Christian on all levels of society including the highest. This was a striking departure from paganism, which held the sovereign above all laws. Christian magistrates and tradesmen alike, women and men, fighters and monks, were all held bound and limited by the laws of God Almighty. That made the clergy important, for it was its duty to remind and to teach and to monitor the obedience to those laws.

In the Middle Ages, therefore, there was no conflict between the Church and Carolingian rulers: that came later. The Middle Ages saw the Apocalypse as an imminent possibility in part because dangers surrounding the Christians were then both real and close. The Vikings were real, not imaginary; the Hungarians were not Christ-

Christ, removing especially the men from godly action. Virtually neutering them and rendering them as *passive idiots* who sit in front of a box to receive information that they're told to receive and do nothing with their lives. Television stands between too many Christians and the church in general, between too many Christians and dominion. It is not simply a case of TV versus dominion. I make it very plain. It is *television or dominion*. As long as Christians — men especially, but women as well — are locked to the TV set, we will not take the inheritance that is ours in Christ. It's that simple. The problem is hard to overstate. Television is an ubiquitous narcotic that is enervating an unsuspecting church and its presence is increasing. The danger is not limited to content, that is most obvious. But it is an enemy of dominion in the nature and function of the medium itself, at least as it is used today." (Steve Schlissel, *Television or Dominion*, Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, n.,d., p. 5, emphasis in original.)

### Television and Violence

"About violence the small screen generally has four things to say. First, violence is usually done by the good man for moral reasons. He wins his case by being better at the karate chop, faster on the draw, more adept at the kick in the groin than his opponent. The best man is the man who is best at violence.

"Second, violence does not hurt very much. A razor slash shows no blood. An Indian falls painlessly from a horse. A gunshot wound — festering and ugly — is never seen. The true physical consequences of violence are hidden or anaesthetised.

"Third, there is little pity for the victims of violence, unlike classic drama where the arousal of pity and terror — Aristotle's *Catharsis* — were the means of purging violence. When Gloucester's eyes are torn out in *King Lear* we feel revulsion; when a king is murdered in the tragedies of Euripides or Sophocles the suffering of the wife and children is one of the play's dominant themes. But in television there is rarely any concern or compassion for the relatives of the Russian spy who has been obliterated by an X-ray gun or the offspring of the gangster who has been dropped in a coffin of cement into the sea.

"Fourth, society demands no explanation and little expiation for an act of violence. There are few sanctions to

6. See: "Human Sacrifice," in Vol. III, *The Selected Writings of Lord Acton, Essays in Religion, Politics and Morality* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1988), pp. 395-443.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Henry Mayr-Harting, "The West: The Age of Conversion (700-1050)" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, p. 192.



ianized, and Charlemagne was fighting the Avars.

At such a time the prayers and the asceticism and the alms were needed to avert catastrophe — which might occur in any event, for the ways of God are mysterious, and the clergy was necessary to console and to advise, to assure people that failure as well as success was God-given.

Meanwhile the task of the clergy was to inculcate a Christianity in societies profoundly different from those Christians who had a Roman past. In this the work of Irish monks was especially important. But so were all the monks of Europe important. Monks and nuns helped define Christianity in small local communities and also in royal courts and aristocratic households.

In England the Church owed much, and shared much, with Gaul. The Goth settlers in ancient Spain converted in the 580s, and Isadore saw Spain as a Christian land where differences in heritage were unimportant. But North Africa had been reconquered by the Vandals in 530. The Lombards, after the collapse of the Gothic regime in Italy, slowly settled into Christianity, but western Europe in the year 700 was far from being a Christendom.

But a foundation had been laid for a cultural revival, a breakdown of the isolation in which individual centres of art, learning and devotion had existed. Westerners began to review the ancient world; gospel books were copied and illuminated; the vitality of a pre-Christian Celtic past was fused with newly discovered artistic and intellectual traditions of the late antique Mediterranean world.<sup>9</sup>

Modern western historians, impatient with the history of the Christian religion (which they leave to theologians to interpret), have not told students much about the immense effects of Muslim power upon Christianity. One exception, the Frenchman Henri Pirenne, in a book titled *Mohamed and Charlemagne*, has discussed how the Mediterranean civilization successfully resisted repeated Germanic invasions and settlements, but was cut in half by the loss of North Africa to Islam in the eighth century.

This meant not only the Bishopric of Augustine, but the loss of one of the most intellectually vital branches of the Church. Autonomous through the centuries, the Church in North Africa

had served as a balancing influence between western Christianity and Byzantium, and was strong enough to give pause to popes and emperors. "Its removal meant the removal of a permanent source of fruitful tension. The Roman See emerged as the sole religious authority and center of the barbarian West. The Western Church could forget the tensions that had enriched her life while Rome was one of several great sees. Increasingly cut off from the Eastern churches, and with Carthage eclipsed, Rome could become the unchallenged teacher and mistress of new nations. . . ."<sup>10</sup> It also meant that Islam had become — and would remain for centuries, Christendom's greatest and closest foreign military and religious threat. How odd that western schools seldom discuss this, and the West has forgotten it almost entirely.

The drive to Christianize the balance of Europe was religious, but also political. Western security depended upon unity. The great, final period of missionary effort extended from the year 700 to 1050. It is this period that most people envision when they say, "Middle Ages." It was a time of armor and knights, castles and agricultural progress, feudalism and military adventures, and not a time of scholars, great theologians — or great heretics.<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion

By the late Middle Ages Europe had become Christian after immense efforts. Great Cathedrals had been erected; cities had appeared, wealth had been amassed to levels paganism had never achieved. A great mosaic of peoples had been civilized. Forests had given way to agriculture — a development our environmentalists today seek to destroy. Wild animals were no longer a menace, which our Animal Rights people would deplore. Music had been brought to society by the Church and its chants and shrines dotted the landscape. International trade had been resurrected, and holy men — and women — were revered.

Almost all the advances of which we are today proud, and which we are today losing, were made during the centuries of the Middle Ages. The right to limit the government, the right not to be taxed without consent, the right to trial by jury, the right to vote, to have an elected assembly, to live under the rules of law and not of men, the right to choose one's own profession and many more — were estab-

be paid for killing or mayhem. Only rarely does the State demand that a killer stand trial for murder or manslaughter; how often are private eyes or cowboys or spy hunters faced with a charge of assault and battery? More often the reward for a vicious act of violence — beating up a villain or shooting him dead — is the smiling blonde who greets the hero to accompanying fade-out music.

"Now if we couple this total message of the desirability and success of violence in the right hands with the other message put across by the box that life is essentially trivial, greedy and silly, we have a cast-iron ethical formula for the justification of violence. If a society is so unworthy and yet cannot be changed by legal and democratic means, isn't the exercise of violence a perfectly moral way to bring about necessary changes? Furthermore, isn't the use of violence a moral way to right a personal wrong or get what you want?"

"Thus there is a formidable case for assuming that television by normalising and glorifying violence, by trivialising authority, by reflecting life as cheap, frivolous and greedy, has made some contribution to the rise of violence amongst the telly generation in those countries where television conducts itself primarily as an entertainment medium. . . ." (Milton Shulman, *The Ravenous Eye: The Impact of the*

lished in the Middle Ages. Those who deny these facts prove, by their denials, their lack of learning.

All this had taken a half a millennium from Alaric's Sack of Rome, and if we count from the beginning of Christianity — as we should, a little over a thousand years. I have touched very lightly upon that immense period of time. Its developments, larger and more sweeping than any ever before made, were on the verge of change when Pope Gregory appeared (1075-85); but our subject was the Middle Ages. These were the ages when Christianity conquered Europe: only the Scandinavians still remained outside the fold, but they would convert in the next century or so. They would be the last of the Europeans to do so.

No other religion had so transformed any civilization as had the Christians changed the Romans. No other, later, proceeded to transform the world. It is still doing so.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

10. *Ibid.*, p.91

11. *Ibid.*, p. 92