

History 7: Medieval Europe
May 11 – May 15
Time Allotment: 30 minutes per day

Student Name: _____

Teacher Name: _____



Packet Overview

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Further Instructions:

To deepen your understanding of the material, watch our fun and helpful videos on Google Classroom, especially the one for this week! Also, for the **maps and images**, you probably will want to look online to see the **color version**.

Academic Honesty

I certify that I completed this assignment independently in accordance with the GHNO Academy Honor Code.

Student signature:

I certify that my student completed this assignment independently in accordance with the GHNO Academy Honor Code.

Parent signature:

Monday, May 11

History Unit: High Middle Ages
Lesson 1: St. Francis and the Franciscans

Lesson 1 Socratic Guiding Question: Keep this question in mind as you study!
What does it take to reform corruption in the Church?

Objective: Be able to do this by the end of this lesson.

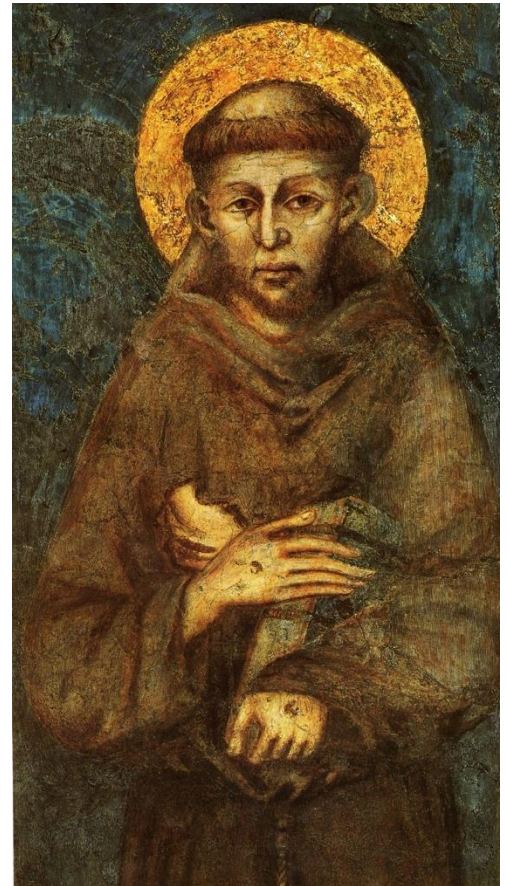
1. Explain how Francis reformed the Church during his life.

Introduction

In the past two weeks we have heard of many good things that the Church had done in Medieval Europe; we have also learned about the corruption which existed when we learned about simony and lay investiture. While popes like Gregory VII had reformed these problems from the top down, new (though related) problems had arisen. The most pressing problem now was wealthy clergy who cared more for worldly pleasure than for shepherding their flock. In response, there were many people who helped to reform the Church from within. Francesco Bernadone, commonly known as St. Francis, was one of these reformers who lived from 1181-1226. Let's learn about his life and how he helped to reform the Church.

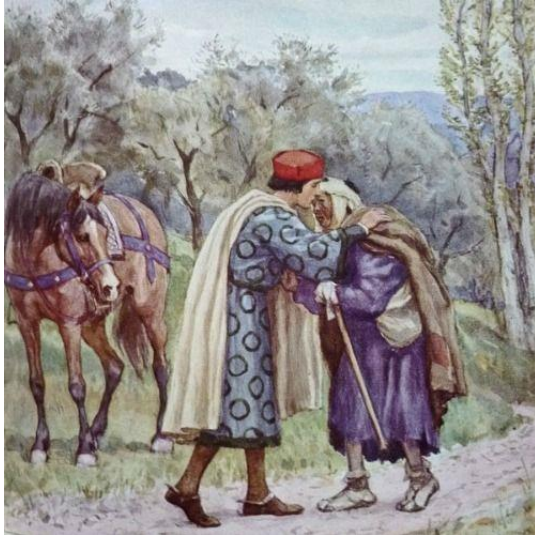
Francesco Bernadone

Francis lived in Assisi, Italy as the son of a fabric merchant. He lived a life of relative ease and comfort. He loved to attend parties and dress in fine clothes as he walked about his home city of Assisi. He made friends with many rich lords and nobles, and would visit these people of importance often until one day, he was journeying to the castle of a powerful Count who was going to bestow certain military honors on Francis. Francis was eager to receive these honors, but, according to his biographer Bonaventure, on the way, Francis heard the voice of God asking him "Francis, who can do you more good, a lord or a servant? And who can make you happier, a rich man or a poor man?" Francis replied that the lord and the rich man could make him happier. The voice then said, "Why, then, do you leave the Lord for the servant and the rich God for a poor mortal Count?" Francis was cut to the heart and said, "Lord, what do you want me to do with my life?" It is reported that the voice told him to return to his city and pray to hear what God's will was.



Francis Meets a Leper

Now, one day after he had returned home, he was riding his horse outside the city of Assisi. As



he was riding, he met a certain leper.¹ Upon seeing and smelling the leper, he was entirely disgusted and utterly repulsed. But when he recalled the voice which he had heard on his way to the Count's house, he remembered that it was best to conquer himself and care for the leper in the name of God. Getting ahold of himself, he leapt from his horse, and ran to embrace the leper. When the leper reached out his hand as if to receive some spare change, Francis kissed it and then put money in it. From that point on, Francis was filled with joy to help the poorest and most destitute, and devoted his life to serving those most in need.

At Mass one day, he heard the Gospel passage read aloud where Christ tells his disciples to “take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff”, Francis' heart leapt for joy at the prospect of living in such poverty. He said, “This is what I desire; yes, this is what I long for with my whole heart.” Francis gave away all his belongings and served the poor while being poor himself.

1. How has Francis' life changed from when he was a young man up to this point?

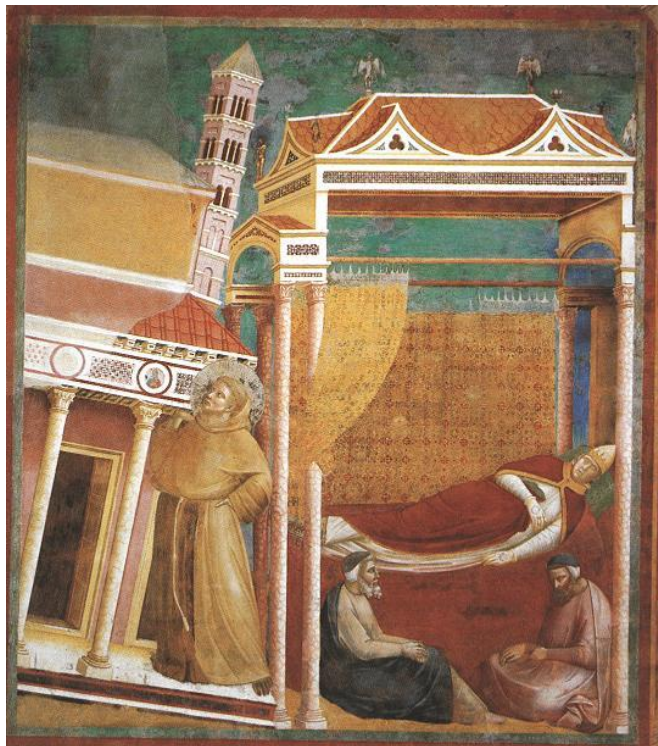
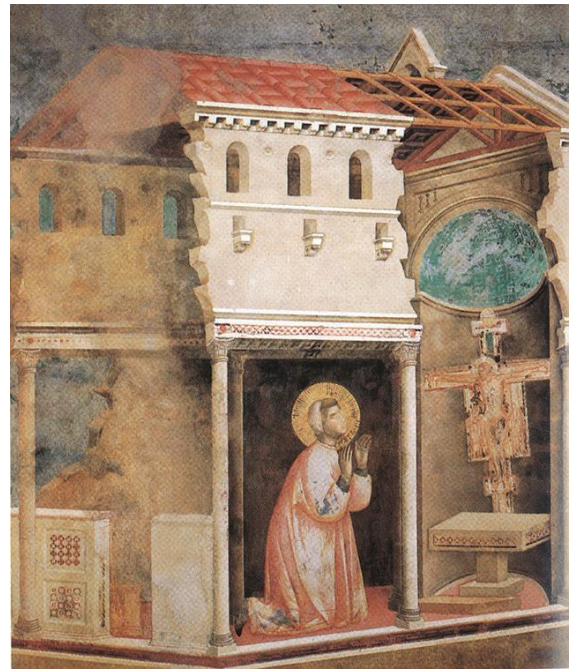
Francis Begins to Rebuild the Church

As was mentioned in the introduction, St. Francis went on to be one of the most successful reformers in Church history in a time when the Church had more than its share of corruption within. Here is Francis' biographer's account of how that reformation began:

¹ Lepers suffer from a highly contagious disease called leprosy which causes one's skin to boil and rot and which can lead to loss of limbs and ultimately death. Leprosy can be spread by touching someone with the disease.

“For on a certain day, when he had gone forth to pray in the fields, Francis was walking near the church of Saint Damian, which from its exceeding great age was threatening to crumble and fall down. At the prompting of the Spirit, he went within to pray. Laying prostrate before an Image of the Jesus Crucified, his eyes were filled with tears. He gazed up, and he heard with his bodily ears a Voice proceeding from that Cross, saying thrice: “Francis, go and repair My House, which, as you can see, is falling utterly into ruin.” Francis trembled, being alone in the church, and was astonished at the sound of such a powerful Voice. Francis then devoted himself wholly to the request to repair the physical church that he was praying in. In reality, the message was actually commanding Francis to rebuild the Church as a whole which in many ways had fallen into corruption.”

(The Life of St. Francis of Assisi by Bonaventure)



How did Francis accomplish this rebuilding of the entire Church? It began when people in Assisi started to notice the strange way in which St. Francis was living. He had given away all his money, clothes, and possessions, and now he was living in the streets with lepers and poor people serving them, comforting them in any way he could, and preaching the Gospel to them. Many people thought he was a kook and insane, but others began to join him in this way of poverty.

Soon, hundreds of men and women wanted to follow St. Francis’ way of life. Francis wrote a Rule similar to St. Benedict’s rule, with some major differences. The pope, though initially skeptical of Francis and his ragtag band of followers, approved Francis’

rule because he had a dream in which “the Lateran church (the pope’s church in Rome) was beginning to crumble and fall down until a tiny ragged man he understood to be Francis came

and by supernatural strength held it up.”² Following this, anyone who joined Francis’ movement became known as a Franciscan. One difference between Franciscans and Benedictines is that Franciscans do not live in a monastery their whole life. Franciscans have the task of travelling the world preaching Christianity and giving an example of simple living to those they meet. Francis sent hundreds of Franciscans to France, Spain, Germany, North Africa, and even Egypt to spread the gospel and reform the Church. When Church leaders who were living corrupt and luxurious lives saw the poverty and love of Franciscans, many repented and changed their lives for the better.



2. Write at least four sentences describing how Francis reformed the Church during his life.

² *In the Beauty of Holiness*, David Jeffrey, 110.

Tuesday, May 12

History Unit: High Middle Ages

Lesson 2: Franciscan Art

Lesson 2 Socratic Guiding Question: Keep this question in mind as you study!

How do different styles of art stir the soul in different ways?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of traditional Byzantine iconography as opposed to the art inspired by the Franciscan movement?

Objective: Be able to do this by the end of this lesson.

1. Differentiate between Byzantine iconography and art inspired by the Franciscan movement.
2. Compare and contrast Byzantine iconography with art inspired by the Franciscan movement.

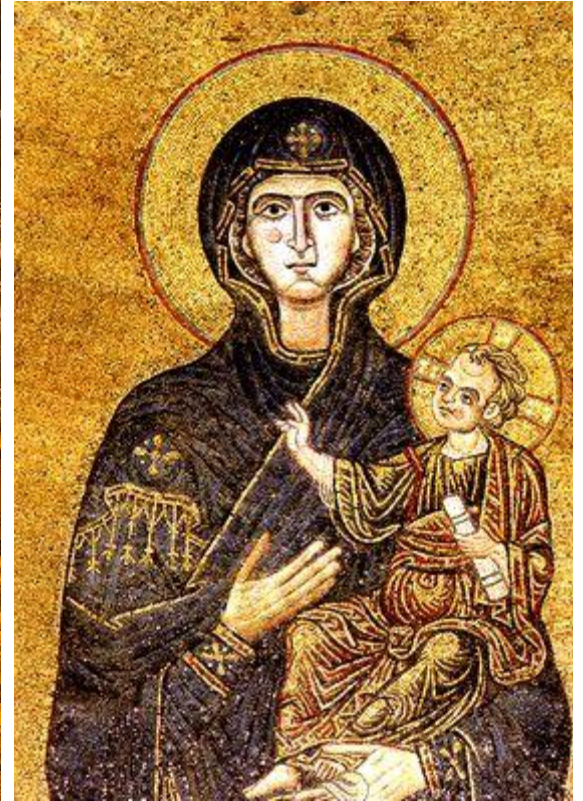
Introduction

The way this lesson will work is that you will look at images and make observations about them on one page, and then on the following page you will read about them. At the end of the lesson you will have an **open note minor assessment**. You may want to look at the prompt for the minor assessment first, to help focus your reading and notetaking.

Art Inspired by the Franciscan movement

The essential spirituality and goal of the Franciscan movement was to imitate the humanity of Christ: embodying his poverty, chastity, obedience to God's will, caring for the sick, and preaching in public. This "grassroots" reform movement swept across Europe, encouraging groups of people in cities all over Europe and the Mediterranean to imitate Christ in these very tangible ways. The movement was so influential that it also inspired a new style of art, which likewise turned its focus to the humanity of Christ and the need for the viewer to respond with piety and devotion. Let's begin by looking at some images of art in the time just before this new Franciscan art movement.

1. Look at the Byzantine mosaics depicted in these images, especially the “Christ Pantokrator” (ruler over all) icon in the middle on the left. What kind of message does this send about Christ (Jesus)? Answer in the space below the images.



The traditional form of art on the previous page, known as *Byzantine iconography*, had the goal of bringing the viewer into contemplation of Christ's majesty through symbols. This is clear from the heavy use of gold, evocative of kingship, Christ's symbolic hand gesture, signifying the Trinity, his carrying of the book/scroll, signifying his divine message, and his halo with the cross, signifying his crucifixion.

This kind of art was the main form of art being produced in the 1200s, just after the life of St. Francis. However, the reform and renewal movement begun by St. Francis was beginning to change the style of art.

How is the style of this painting both similar to and different from the traditional Byzantine icons on the previous page?



Cimabue, *Madonna of the Holy Trinity*, ca. 1290-1300.

The first thing we may notice about the painting from the previous page is that this is a painting—a fresco—rather than a mosaic. While mosaics were well-suited to two-dimensional iconography, where the main goal is to show theological symbols (like the glory and majesty of God), the medium of the painted fresco gives the viewer a feeling of greater nearness to the subject of the image because painting allows for more realistic portrayal of human figures. Still, this painting is traditional and “Byzantine” in several ways: it presents the traditional image of Mary enthroned as the “Queen of Heaven” pointing to Jesus in the traditional manner known as *Hodegetria* (“she shows the way”—i.e. Mary shows the way to Jesus), and Jesus holds his right hand in the traditional gesture of the Trinity. However, compared with the traditional Byzantine mosaic, Jesus’ face looks rather natural; the throne on which Mary sits has been painted so as to suggest the illusion of depth; Mary’s face “engages the viewer in a natural way, and the faces of the angels and Christ child express a warmth and human character rarely implied in a traditional icon of the Byzantine style.”³ Thus, by suggesting human emotion in facial features, the painting somewhat departs from the stoic⁴ facial features of Byzantine iconography. Let’s look at a third image:

How is the style of this painting similar to and different from the Byzantine style of the previous images?



Giotto, *The Lamentation of Christ* fresco, Arena Chapel, Padua, ca. 1305.

³ *In the Beauty of Holiness*, David Jeffrey, 107.

⁴ Plain-faced, expressionless.

While important aspects of Byzantine iconography remain—haloes as symbols of saints (including Christ’s halo with a cross in it), the tree on the hill as symbol of the cross—it is fair to say that the emphasis has changed from depicting the majesty of God to depicting the humanity of God. The figures are much more realistically portrayed: the body of Jesus is pale with death, his followers and even the angels show their pained agony in their tormented facial expressions. Further, it is difficult for the viewer not to be drawn into the characters’ sorrow. The dramatic hand gestures of the character in the middle draw the viewer into the moment of agony to an extent which the Byzantine icon, with its usually stoic characters, was not capable of. The goal is likely to inspire a sorrow at one’s own sin, and through this a greater devotion to loving God. Another way in which art inspired by the Franciscan movement sought to draw the viewer into the image and inspire devotion was by placing a character or multiple characters who weren’t necessarily at the event, into the image, as a model of the reverence and devotion which every Christian owes to Jesus. In the painting below, the character in black, a Benedictine monk, was clearly not present at the Nativity, but serves as a model of the devotion towards Jesus which was intended to be inspired in the viewer.



Fra Angelico, *The Nativity*, 1440-41.

Influence of Franciscan Art

The art inspired by the Franciscan movement, especially that of Duccio, Cimabue, Giotto, and Fra Angelico, eventually gave birth to the Italian Renaissance (Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.) in which artists began to depict events more and more realistically. It’s worth remembering that these innovative artists, especially the first ones (Giotto etc.), rather than being inspired by mere curiosity for technical experimentation, had a spiritual goal in mind—to reform the hearts of the viewers of their art by drawing them more deeply into the humanity of Christ.

Minor Assessment

Look at the two images on this page and the next. Which piece is the Byzantine icon and which was inspired by Franciscan movement? How do you know? Answer in the space below the second image. Your answer need not be any certain length, but you should provide as many specific reasons as possible.





Wednesday, May 13

History Unit: High Middle Ages

Lesson 3: The Albigensian Heresy, Church & State Intervention, and Dominic de Guzman

Lesson 3 Socratic Guiding Question: Keep this question in mind as you study!

Why might both Church and State be prepared to take such severe measures against the growth of serious heretical challenge?

Objective: Be able to do this by the end of this lesson.

1. Describe the beliefs of the Albigensians, their spread and disruption, and what happened to them.

Introduction

The Albigensian heresy derives its name from the town of Albi, which is located in south central France. It may have originated in the mid-10th century with a priest from Bulgaria named Bogol, who preached dualism, which was the central tenet of Albigensians. Many nobles embraced Albigensian teachings or openly tolerated them in the southern part of France. Proponents of the heresy took it to Northern Italy where it also found a home. For example, one third of the city of Florence, Italy became Albigensian by the 1250's.

The town of Carcassonne, France, a stronghold of Albigensians in 1208



Albigensians were dualists. To them, there was a god of light and a god of darkness. They taught that the lesser god was in control of the material world for now, but not forever. Albigensians professed that human souls belong in the kingdom of light, but that the god of darkness captured these souls and took them prisoner. The flesh is evil because the evil god made this material world. They taught that the same evil god is the god of the Old Testament. For the Albigensian, the greatest sin would be to bring forth more souls into this evil world.

Some Albigensian teachings were similar to Christianity, such as the repentance of sins. Albigensian teaching emphasized asceticism—that is, a strict diet and daily life. This made it particularly attractive in a time when so many Christian bishops were wealthy and worldly. Some teachings mimicked and yet also twisted Christian beliefs. Albigensians taught the Consolamentum, which is the term for Albigensian baptism. To become a full-fledged

Albigensian one must fulfill several conditions before choosing to receive the Consolamentum. One must be an adult and spend several years living an ascetic life proving you are worthy to receive it. Additionally, it was supposed to be given near the end of one's life. The Consolamentum was a long, solemn ceremony during which an Albigensian who had already received it, laid hands upon a candidate, and also laid the Gospel of John upon that Candidate's head, and the newly "baptized" Albigensian was then made "perfect".

According to Albigensian belief, there existed the Perfect and the Hearers. The Perfect would not marry. They believed marriage was evil. They did not take oaths. They did not believe in the owning of property. They did not eat meat, fish, milk, or eggs. Instead, the Perfect ate a lot of fruits and vegetables. Albigensian teaching shared that particles of light which were trapped in fruits & vegetables were liberated when eaten. The Perfect practiced poverty.



If a perfectus (a member of the Perfect) fell away from practice, that person could still be saved through "endura" which was either suicide or suffocation. Or one could commit suicide by fasting. Albigensian teaching was that this was only to be done during times of grave persecution.

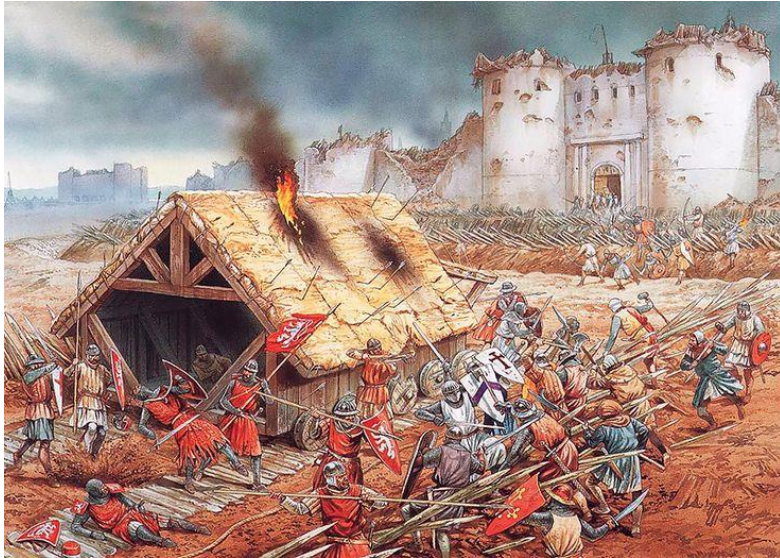
The majority of Albigensian believers were Hearers. The Hearers could go to the Catholic Church and "conform." The Hearers were allowed to own property,

but they could not be married or have children. If a Hearer did not receive the Consolamentum, they might be reincarnated, maybe once, some believed seven times. Albigensians taught that a Hearer would become reincarnated in either a human body or an animal body.

At their worship services, instead of both Old and New Testaments, only the New Testament was read, although some Albigensians accepted the writings of the Psalms and the prophets. A sermon was preached and then the Hearers would kneel down and adore the Perfect! All Albigensians said the *Pater Noster* (the Lord's Prayer). The Perfect then "blessed" the Hearers. They read from the Gospel of John, and finally a common meal was given. Albigensians rejected all material items including Church buildings, crosses, sacraments, and statues. There was no water included as part of the Consolamentum baptism.

Albigensians rejected the Christian view of creation; rejected that the God of Creation was good and that God had made a good creation. Albigensians rejected the Incarnation of Jesus, explaining that he was a mere illusion. The Albigensians rejected the Christian teaching of the resurrection of the body and the sacraments of the Church. The Albigensians also rejected the

teaching of hell and purgatory. Albigensians instead taught that this earth *is* hell and purgatory because of the flesh being evil. Politics became involved in all of this as many nobles embraced these ideas. France was divided into four different regions and nobles in the south became Albigensian. Some nobles became sympathetic because of their own family members.



The situation became dire. Pope Innocent III called for a crusade against the Albigensians. The crusade, which began in 1208 and ended in 1229, included intense questioning of whether individuals were Albigensians, as well as battles between Feudal lords in order to return Europe to its religious and social unity.

1. Write at least four sentences describing the major teachings of the Albigensians.

Dominic de Guzman 1170-1221 AD

While force of arms was one way of reestablishing religious and social unity, another, gentler way existed: preaching the truth in love. This way was spearheaded by a man named Dominic. Born in Caleruega, Spain around the year 1170, Dominic was the son of Felix Guzman and Joanna of Aza, members of the nobility. Dominic received his early education from his uncle, who was a priest, before entering the University of Palencia where he studied for ten years. In one notable incident from this period, he sold his entire collection of rare books to provide for the relief of the poor in the city. After his ordination to the priesthood, Dominic was asked by Bishop Diego of Osma to participate in local church reforms. He spent nine years in Osma, pursuing a life of intense prayer, before being called to accompany the bishop on a piece of business for King Alfonso IX of Castile in 1203. While traveling in France with the bishop, Dominic observed the bad effects of the Albigensian heresy, which had taken hold in southern France during the preceding century.

Dreading the spread of heresy, Dominic began to think about founding a religious order to promote the truth. In 1204, he and Bishop Diego were sent by Pope Innocent III to assist in the

effort against the Albigensians—through theological persuasion, rather than military force. In France, Dominic engaged in doctrinal debates and set up a convent whose rule would eventually become a template for the life of female Dominicans. He continued his preaching mission from 1208 to 1215, during the intensification of the military effort against the Albigensians.

In 1214, Dominic's extreme physical asceticism caused him to fall into a coma, during which the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to him and instructed him to promote the prayer of the Rosary. Its focus on the Incarnation and life of Christ directly countered the Albigensian attitude towards matter as evil.



During that same year, Dominic returned to Toulouse and

obtained the bishop's approval of his plan for a religious order dedicated to preaching. He and a group of followers gained local recognition as a religious congregation, and Dominic accompanied Toulouse's bishop to Rome for an ecumenical council in 1215. The council stressed the Church's need for better preaching, but also set up a barrier to the institution of new religious orders. Dominic, however, obtained papal approval for his plan in 1216, and was named as the Pope's chief theologian. The Order of Preachers expanded in Europe with papal help in 1218 and was a significant force in bringing an end to the Albigensian heresy. Today, many Dominicans continue their role as preachers, often as teachers in schools and professors in universities.

2. Write two sentences explaining how Dominic worked to convert the Albigensians.

Thursday, May 14

History Unit: High Middle Ages
Lesson 4: The Black Death

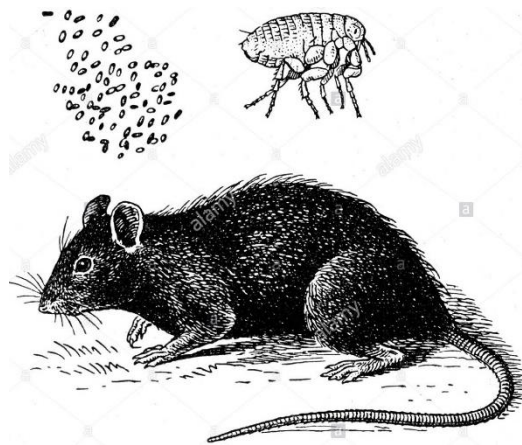
Lesson 4 Socratic Guiding Question: Keep this question in mind as you study!
What is the appropriate response in the time of plague?

Objective: Be able to do this by the end of this lesson.

1. Explain the effects of the Black Death on the economy and the Church hierarchy.

Introduction

One misty Autumn morning of October 1347, in the port of Messina on the coast of Sicily, 12 ships from the Black Sea crawl into the harbor. Merchants gather on the docks to meet the incoming traders and unload the cargo. Strangely, however, few people can be seen on the ships, and a foul smell hovers about the vessels. After docking them, Italians cautiously enter the ships' lower decks, but are met with a cargo of corpses. The few survivors are reported to have "sickness clinging to their very bones." When the townspeople realize the danger, they try to banish the plague ships from their harbor. But it is too late. The plague has already taken hold and the dying begins. The plague spreads from city to city throughout Europe, and by the year 1351 has killed approximately 1/3 of the population of Europe. No one can account for why this pestilence which spares no one has come, except to say that God has sent it on account of their sins.



Causes

How did this happen? The disease spread from person to person through the air, as well as through the bite of infected fleas and rats. Both of these pests could be found almost everywhere in medieval Europe, but they were particularly at home aboard ships of all kinds—which is how the deadly plague made its way through one European port city after another. It probably first entered Europe from Asia when the Mongols attacked the port city of Caffa on the Black Sea.

Symptoms

The sickness, known as the "bubonic plague", was characterized by "buboes" or swellings that became red and then black as they rotted. "In men and women alike," the Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio wrote, "at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits...waxed to the bigness of a common apple, others to the size of an egg, some more

and some less, and these the vulgar named plague-boils.” Blood and pus seeped out of these strange swellings, which were followed by a host of other unpleasant symptoms— fever, chills, vomiting, terrible aches and pains—and then, often within 48 hours, death. Approximately 85% of people who got the plague died.



Treatment

Though medicine at the time was not as advanced as it is today, people knew that the plague spread through the air. One way of trying to protect oneself was to wear a mask (sound familiar?) with lots of herbs in it, to clean the air one breathed. Some people bathed in vinegar or rosewater or burned scented herbs. Some doctors continued to treat the sick. Others refused to see patients. For some, their family members were the only ones to take care of them. Others were abandoned altogether. The plague spared none.

Economic Impact

Though the Feudal System had already been declining, the Black Death hastened its end. Because so many people died, Feudal lords had difficulty finding people to work their farmland. Since labor was so hard to come by, the surviving peasants (serfs) were no longer tied to a particular farm, and the now could bargain for higher wages. Thus it became possible for peasants to move about, accumulate land and wealth, and rise to a higher social level. This brought pushback from the nobility, who tried to maintain their social power, leading to occasional revolts by the peasants. In most places in Central and Western Europe, the Feudal System had ended by 1500.

1. How did the Black Death affect the economy?

Religious Responses and Impact on the Church

Imagine you are a Christian priest in this situation. It is a priest's duty to serve and minister to the people. This was particularly important when someone died. The priest was supposed to hear the dying person's last confession of sins, anoint him with oil, and give him a final blessing and prayer—a practice known as “Last Rites”. And yet, you the priest know how easily this disease spreads, you know that it can travel through the air. A messenger comes with a note, urgently requesting that you give someone dying of the plague their last rites. Up to now, you've managed to steer clear of the plague—no symptoms yet. You know that if you go into the sickroom, you're almost certain to catch the plague. Do you risk your life for the sake of this person's soul?

This was the situation that nearly every priest would be put into in the years from 1347-1351. Many priests responded heroically, accepting death for the sake of the people in their church. We know that “mortality for priests during the Black Death was ‘42 to 45 percent’, which is higher than the overall mortality rates for the general population (...around 30%). Priests who cared for the sick were dying at a high rate, and no wonder: the sheer exhaustion and repeated exposure of moving from home to home at all times of day and night to visit the dying would have made priests especially vulnerable.”⁵ The pope at this time, named Clement VI, had many faults and initially gave way to fear: he “retreated to his chamber, saw nobody, and spent all day and night sheltering between two enormous fires,”⁶ taking the advice of his doctor. Yet courageously, he changed his mind and turned his energies to supervising sick care, burials, and the pastoral care of the dying. He never contracted the disease, even though there was so much death around him that the cities ran out of ground for cemeteries. Further, he sought to bring an end to the madness that had ensued among the people. Some groups of Christians blamed Jews and killed them in large numbers; others, known as “Flagellants”, whipped themselves with cords in hopes of avoiding the plague—which they understood to be God's punishment—by this flashy display of self-wounding. The pope condemned both of these practices, set aside land for Jews fleeing other towns to live on, and called on priests to take action to protect Jews as he had done.

But there were also many priests who abandoned their duty, gripped by fear. Leaving the dying to their fate in the cities, some fled to the country to escape the plague, and those who did so had a higher chance of survival. This meant that many faithful priests died, while many corrupt priests survived. In addition, the deaths of so many priests meant that there was a huge need for more priests. In order fill this priest shortage, the Church shortened the required training period of priests, making it easier for people to become priests more quickly. While this helped remedy the need for priests, it also meant that these priests were less educated. The long-term result was that in the time after the plague, many priests were either corrupt or poorly educated, which weakened the Church.

1. Write at least 4 sentences about how the Black Death affected the hierarchy (i.e. priests) of the Church.

⁵ <https://www.medievalists.net/2015/02/priests-black-death/>

⁶ *The Glory of Christendom*, Warren Carroll, 392.

End of the Plague

While in most places, the plague had run its course by 1351, it did not end swiftly. There were periodic lesser outbreaks for many years in the following centuries, even as late as the 1800s.



Friday, May 15

History Unit: High Middle Ages
Lesson 5: St. Catherine of Siena

Lesson 5 Socratic Guiding Question: Keep this question in mind as you study!
What does it take to reform corruption in the Church?

Objective: Be able to do this by the end of this lesson.

1. Explain how Catherine reformed the Church during her life.

Introduction

Catherine of Siena was an international political figure, a feminine hero, and a doctor of the Church. Catherine was not a nun, however, but a member of the Dominican Third Order. Thus she followed the life pattern of the Dominicans.

Think of her as an old-fashioned Italian matriarch, pious but sharp-tongued, who scandalized as many people as she influenced. Picture this short, frail lady, garbed in worn, rough clothes, in some of her typical daily activities, which included:

- Managing a large household of followers, all of whom called her “Mama.”
- Living in poverty and begging with her disciples for everything they needed.
- Fasting severely but always seeing that her friends were well fed. Cooking food, baking bread, and sometimes praying for a miraculous multiplication or delivery of food.
- Praying for many hours at a time, at times seeming to become weightless when deep in prayer. People claim to have seen her floating a few inches off the ground.
- Reading the thoughts and knowing the temptations of her associates, even at long distances. She saw people’s secret sins and confronted these people, urging them to repent. She touched hearts so effectively that the Friars Preachers had to designate three priests to handle the confessions of her penitents.
- Interceding fiercely for hardened criminals in Siena’s jails.
- Caring for the sick.
- Finally, offering advice to popes and princes. However, she was not so much an international politician as she was a spiritual director, and her venue was not the entire world but a small quadrant in northern Italy. The issue that concerned her most was not governmental but ecclesiastical.



Catherine Brings the Pope Back to Rome

In 1376, Catherine worked to repair a breach between Pope Gregory XI and a league of northern Italian cities led by Florence. Since 1305, the papacy had been a cause of contention between the French and the Italians. Turmoil in Rome and conflict with the emperor had forced the popes to retreat to Avignon in southern France. For decades, the Pope had been living in France and not in Rome! Catherine shared the popular Italian desire to restore the papacy to Rome. Pope Gregory XI was willing to make the move, but his powerful French advisers resisted.



Catherine conducted a campaign of letters to all sides and offered to mediate directly. She wrote Pope Gregory XI six times, exhorting him to return to Rome. The pope said that Catherine addressed him with an “intolerably dictatorial tone, a little sweetened with expressions of her perfect Christian deference.” Encouraged by the Florentines, she went to Avignon on a peacemaking mission.

Apparently, the pope had made a secret vow to move back to Rome, and this vow was revealed to Catherine. When she met the pope at Avignon, she didn’t hesitate to use that inspired bit of information to pressure him. “Keep the promise you have made,” she urged, to his great surprise. Not long after this encounter, Gregory XI returned the papacy to Rome. Catherine’s efforts to reconcile the pope and the Italian cities finally succeeded during the reign of Urban VI, Gregory’s successor.

1. Why might it be important to Catherine that the Pope return to Rome?
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Catherine Heals the Sick and Injured

When the Black Plague struck Siena, Catherine and her friends courageously tended the sick. The disease eventually struck Matteo, the rector of the city's hospital and a close friend of Catherine. When she got the news, she hurried off to see him. She was hot with anger at the plague, and even before she reached his bed she began shouting from a distance: "Get up, Matteo, get up! This is not time for lying in a soft bed!" At this command, Matteo's fever, swelling, and pain disappeared.

Catherine slipped away to avoid attracting attention. Just then Raymond—unaware of the miracle—approached and begged her to pray for Matteo's recovery.

"What?" exclaimed Catherine, pretending to be offended. "Do you think I am God that I can deliver someone from death?"

"Don't give me that!" said Raymond. "I know that Jesus does whatever you ask him to." Catherine smiled mischievously. "Cheer up," she said. "He won't die this time."

A short time later, Raymond shared a hearty celebration meal with Matteo, who a few hours before could barely open his mouth.

One day in Catherine's neighborhood, a balcony collapsed, hurtling a woman to the ground. The victim lived near Catherine, and they were friends. Falling debris had so badly cut and bruised the woman that she could not move. Catherine visited her injured friend and tried to comfort her. In a soothing gesture, she touched the woman, and the pain immediately left that spot. The woman begged Catherine to touch another place that hurt. There, too, the pain vanished. So they kept it up—the woman requesting that Catherine touch injured places until all the pain was gone. The woman had recovered completely. "Catherine," she told everyone, "has cured me by touching me."

Catherine Miraculously Produces Gallons of Wine

Once, on a visit to Pisa, Catherine found herself in a seriously weakened condition. Raymond of Capua and other friends sought a remedy to strengthen her. They searched for some *vernaccia*, a wine with healing properties. Vernaccia was supposed to bring relief when applied to a sick person's temples and wrists. Catherine's friends asked a neighbor who always stocked vernaccia to give them a decanter. "I would gladly give you the barrel if I had it," he said, "but it has been



empty for three months.” For emphasis, he pulled the spigot from the barrel and then stared in amazement as wine gushed forth. So Catherine’s friends miraculously obtained medicine for her.

To Catherine’s great embarrassment, news of the miracle spread throughout Pisa. She was back on her feet in a few days, and people greeted her excitedly. “Well, what do you know,” someone teased. “You don’t drink wine but you can fill an empty cask with it!”

The hubbub displeased Catherine. “O Lord,” she prayed with near-irreverent familiarity, “why have you willed to inflict me with the pain of this mockery? Who asked you for the wine, anyway? For a long time I’ve deprived my body of wine, but now wine is making a joke of me. By your infinite mercy, have pity on me! Do something and put an end to this chatter.”

The wine turned as sour as vinegar and was no longer drinkable. The owner of the miracle barrel and those who came to sample the wine stopped talking about it. Catherine was delighted.

Catherine of Siena is an important figure even if considered only an ambassador who straightened out affairs of church and state. She can be admired more and more as one becomes better acquainted with her. She was a sweet curmudgeon. The beatitude says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” That text sums up Catherine’s life perfectly. And she brings our study of the Middle Ages to a fitting conclusion, for she is truly one of the most beautiful blooms of the Medieval Age.⁷



Describe how Catherine reformed the Church in at least 3 sentences.

⁷ Source: Loyola Press