Western Europe in the Middle Ages

Chapter 13 Notes

Middle Ages 500-1500

- The Middle Ages are also called the Medieval Period.
- The foundations of early medieval society were:
  - Classical heritage of Rome
  - Christian beliefs
  - Customs of Germanic tribes

Medieval Western Europe

- Germanic Invasions trigger changes with the fall of the Roman Empire
  1. Disruption of trade: invasions from land & sea
  2. Downfall of cities
  3. Decline of learning
    1. Germanic invaders who stormed Rome could not read or write
    2. Loss of a common language
- Local kings and lords governed territorial units: people adhered to local laws rather than to rules of entire kingdom

Clovis

- Clovis was the leader of a Germanic people called the Franks.
- He brought Christianity to the regions of present day France and Switzerland.

Germanic People Adopt Christianity

- The Roman Catholic Church grew in importance after Roman (secular) authority declined: became unifying force in western Europe
- The Papacy became world power in politics under Gregory I
  - Used church revenues to raise armies, repair roads, & help the poor
Negotiated peace treaties

The Role of Monasticism

- In religious communities called monasteries, monks gave up their possessions and devoted themselves to prayer and good works.
- Monasteries were centers of education where monks opened schools, kept libraries, and copied books.
- Convents were religious communities for women who broke from society to follow God. They were called nuns.

Charles Martel (The Hammer)

- Mayor of the palace for the Frankish king in 719.
- Defeated Muslim raiders from Spain at the Battle of Tours in 732.
- Became a Christian hero

Pepin The Short

- Charles Martel passed power on to his son Pepin
- Pepin fought the Lombards who threatened Rome.
- In return the pope crowned him “king by the grace of God.”
- He began the Carolingian Dynasty that ruled the Franks until 987.

Age of Charlemagne

- Charles the Great: Germanic leader who inherited kingdom of the Franks and revived the idea of the Roman Empire in Western Europe.
- Charlemagne conquered vast territories from opposing Germanic tribes and forced them to convert to Christianity.
- Through military power, Frankish kings brought greater stability to Western Europe.

Holy Roman Emperor

- Charlemagne traveled to Rome to fight in support of Pope Leo III.
- Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day in 800.
Revival of the Roman Empire

- The alliance between Frankish kings and the church re-established Roman culture in Western Europe.
- Most of the territory of Western Europe was included in the new empire governed by Charlemagne.
  - Churches, roads, and schools were built to unite the empire
  - Power of the church was established in political life
  - Roman culture was reinterpreted as the Germanic peoples built their empire
  - Charlemagne promoted the arts and learning: monasteries

A Short Lived Empire

- When Charlemagne died, he left his kingdom to his son Louis the Pious.
- Louis was an a devout Christian, but an ineffective ruler.
- Louis’ three sons: Lothair, Charles the Bald, and Louis the German fought one another for control of the empire.
- The Treaty of Verdun divided the empire into three kingdoms.
- The lack of strong rulers and central authority, led to a new social, economic, & political system during the Middle Ages called Feudalism.

Invaders Attack Western Europe

- The Vikings attacked from Scandinavia with lethal speed.
- The Magyars attacked on horseback from the east and Muslims invaded settlements on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts.

Feudalism

- Without a Roman or Frankish central authority, people had little protection against invasion.
- They entered into feudal agreements with land-holding lords who promised them protection.
Feudal Terms

- **Lord**: Nobleman who owned a vast amount of land
- **Fief**: A portion of land granted to a vassal
- **Vassal**: Men who received a fief and pledged military service to the lord
- **Serf**: Peasant who was legally bound to work a certain piece of land
- Feudalism was a system of mutual obligations
- In the feudal system, people stayed in the class they were born into

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The Medieval Manor

- A Lord’s estate in feudal Europe was called a manor
- Lord provided serf with housing and serf maintained estate in return for a place to live and protection in case of invasion
Manors were self-sufficient: Everything that was needed was provided there

- Harshness of manor life
  1. High taxes
  2. Little food, lived in crowded cottages

Knights and Chivalry

- Feudal lords needed warriors to defend their land
- Knights became vassals who were obligated to serve in battle.
- Knights trained for battle from an early age
  - At age 7, a son of a noble would become a page
  - At 14, he became a squire
At 21, a squire became a knight

- They practiced skills at tournaments

- Knights supposedly lived according to standards of chivalry which required them to fight bravely for their lord, their God, and their lady

Influence of the Roman Catholic Church

- Roman Catholic Church grew in importance after Roman authority declined
  1. Church became the unifying force in Europe
  2. Church united people while feudalism divided
  3. Church and state competed for power

- Monasteries preserved Greco-Roman cultural achievements

- Missionaries carried Christianity & Latin alphabet to Germanic tribes

- The Church (parish priests) served the social, political, and religious needs of the people