Chapter 4

Early Christianity & Upheaval and Transition in Western Europe
Origins

- Roots lie in Judaism, the teachings of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles
- Earliest converts were Jews who did not think they were breaking away from Hebrew Law
  - Earliest Christians wished to be considered Jews since the Jewish religion was officially recognized by the Roman government and its adherents had certain privileges
A NEW DIRECTION

- After Jewish revolts of 66-70 AD and during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, Christians began to emphasize their separateness
  - Gulf between Jews and Christians had become huge by this time
- Christian leaders had decided that Gentiles who converted to Christianity did not have to become Jews in order to become Christians
- There were dangers to this policy
  - Unapproved religion
  - Roman government by the time of Nero or Domitian had decided that to be guilty of just the name Christian was punishable by death
GROWTH

• Christianity strongest initially in Asia Minor and Greece
  - Also took hold in Rome and western provinces

• Hellenistic religions helped pave the way for success of Christianity
  - Shared similarities with such cults as Isis made Christianity acceptable

• But many also found Christianity superior to Hellenistic cults
  - Central was Jesus, a historical rather than a mythological figure
  - His teachings presented in the Gospels
    - Attracted many
    - Books were elevated in tone and content but written in the language of the people and in a style that many educated people sneered at
Although Christian literature began to be composed in classical rhetoric style after 100 AD, it was still difficult for highly educated people to become Christian.

- Pagan intellectuals still offended by crude style.
- Huge spiritual gulf between Christian and pagan because much of Roman world offended Christians.

St. Jerome confessed that his first exposure to Jewish literature and Christian works repelled him when he compared them to the polished style of Cicero.

- Saw obscenity, loose sexual morals, skepticism, materialism and hedonism everywhere.
- Some retreated into social isolation.
WIDENING GAP

• Many early Christians, including St. Paul, advocated obedience to imperial and local authorities
  - But they were also aliens in an intellectual, cultural, and social sense
  • Began to gradually set up a state within a state after the reign of Nero and generally came to reject the entire social and cultural foundation of the empire
    - As a result, they came to be seen by the Roman government as a threat to the existing order of things
CHRISTIANS AND THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE

• Christianity grew most rapidly as the empire declined
  - Caused a number of individuals to argue that Christianity contributed to decline
    • Notably Edward Gibbon
    • Point has some validity as long as it is not overplayed
      - Loyalty of many Christians was to the Church, not the Empire
        » Were not upset about prospect of the end of the Empire
      - But Christianity had nothing to do with other problems that caused ultimate collapse
        » Civil war, famine, plague, and barbarian invasions
NEW PAGAN GODS

- Traditional religion also changed during this time of troubles
  - Cult of Sol Invictus
    - United sun god of Emesa with all other major sun gods
    - Recognized as chief god of the state by time of emperor Aurelian
      - Replaced Jupiter at the top
THE NEW PAGANISM

- **Mithraism**
  - Filled with mystery and mysticism
  - Spread as rapidly as Christianity during 3rd century AD
  - Devotees did speak of Mithra as the “only god” but they meant that all the other gods could be understood through him

- Paganism did not decline during this period because pagan cults were well-adapted to the search for new gods and inner peace
PERSECUTION

• Great persecutions of Christians began in 3rd century AD
  - Started by emperor Decius around 250 and continued until death of Galerius in 311

• Christian intolerance of pagan beliefs bred powerful retaliatory hatred of Christians
  - Accused Christians of cannibalism, atheism, and of being haters of mankind
  - Charged with being sneaky and with dishonoring the emperor
  - Also blamed with all the evils that afflicted the state
INTELLECTUAL DEBATE

• Pagan intellectuals began to attack Christianity
  - Celsus and Porphyry attacked Christianity with reason and ridicule
    • Pointed out inconsistencies, contradictions, and impossibilities
• Christian intellectuals responded in kind
  - Origen of Alexandria provided rational-philosophical basis for Christianity
• Entire intellectual discourse had little impact on growth of Christianity
  - Because it was completely immune to rational argument
  - Most people adopted Christianity because they accepted its relatively simple message on an emotional, not an intellectual, level
POPULAR HOSTILITY

- Celsus and Porphyry saw evolving structure of Christian Church as a dangerous state within a state and charged it caused divided loyalties
  - Neither, however, advocated persecution of Christians
  - Nevertheless, a strong popular aversion to Christians continued to exist and manifested itself continually
- Such as massacre of Christians at Lugdunum in 170 AD
MOTIVATION FOR PERSECUTIONS

- Emperors like Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelian deplored the ignorance and stubbornness of Christians but did not think they were responsible for disasters that afflicted the state.
  - But many of the later military emperors came from the same stock as superstitious pagans of Lugdunum and believed that disasters of the age reflected anger of the gods at Christians.
- Beginning with Decius, they felt duty-bound to free the state of what they saw as a sacrilegious, blasphemous, and dangerous group.
REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

• In the end, the persecutions did not succeed in eradicating Christianity
  - Simply too many Christians and some were in a position to protect others
  - Persecutions also created martyrs who inspired others
  - Came to an end with death of Galerius and then Constantine officially protected them
• Constantine credited with being the first Christian emperor
JULIAN THE APOSTATE

- Sons of Constantine followed father’s policy towards Christians
- Nephew named Julian the Apostate became emperor in 360 and tried to restore paganism and weaken Christianity by reducing privileges of Christians
  - Prohibited them from holding teaching positions
  - But he was overthrown and killed in 363 AD
Theodosius became emperor in 379 AD and proclaimed Christianity to be the official religion of the state. Christians immediately began to persecute pagans. Destroyed temples or converted them into churches. Church firmed up its organization and settled theological disputes with a powerful intellectual vigor.
MIXED BLESSING FOR THE EMPIRE

- Church now began to voraciously swallow up money and men
  - Many men of outstanding ability turned away from public service and joined the Church
    - St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Jerome
    - Wealthiest man in the empire, Paulinus of Nola, sold all his family’s possessions and became a monk
Constantine had divided the empire in half, each ruled by a co-emperor, with the eastern emperor in Constantinople as the senior partner. The two halves would gradually drift apart and become, by 395, basically independent political entities. Fatal development for the West: 65% of all revenue came from the East but 66% of the entire army was stationed in the West. Result was horrible and insoluble financial crisis in the West: troops went unpaid, supplies could not be purchased, bribes could not be paid to barbarian chiefs, etc.

Division of the Empire into two independent halves left the Western half very weak and vulnerable—just as the Germans were renewing their attacks on the frontier again, could not be paid to barbarian chiefs, etc.
GOVERNMENT

• Diocletian’s effort to restore prestige by exalting his status also cut ruler off from the people
  - Emperors remained isolated in their palaces, surrounded by retainers, and only met with ambassadors and wealthiest men

• Government was controlled by huge bureaucracy
  - Divided into civilian and military departments
  - Numbered 30,000
  - Notoriously corrupt

• Average citizen cut off from all access to the emperor and left at the mercy of a corrupt and unjust bureaucracy
BIG PROBLEMS

• Government became increasingly rigid, inflexible, and brutal
  - Operated on the assumption that any sort of change would lead to further decline

• Theodosian Code locked all men who worked in all trades and services permanently in their occupations

• Taxes were doubled

• Horrible inflation occurred

• Many laws stipulated horrible punishments for minor crimes

• Imperial officials beat and terrorized the people they were supposed to serve

• Town officials frozen in jobs and given impossibly high tax quotas to collect
FEUDALIZATION

• Cities declined further and power of large rural landowners increased
  - In the West, cities declined rapidly and urban dwellers fled into the countryside
• Gradually fell under the control of large landowners
  - In exchange for oaths of loyalty and annual fees and rents, these immigrants were granted small plots of land and military protection of landlord
• Aristocrats and peasants were constructing a network of relatively stable and independent cells that would survive the collapse of the Western Empire and serve as foundation for the Middle Ages
In the West, church leaders adopted an independent attitude towards the state. What remained of towns and cities looked to Church, not the corrupt state, for protection and justice.

- Bishop of Rome, Leo I, convinced Attila not to invade Italy.
  - Emperor did nothing but hide.
SHIFT OF LOYALTY

• Because of the leadership of the Church, German barbarians tended to be generally respectful towards church leaders

• Many Roman citizens had come to view the state as a parasitical vampire
  - Robbing and persecuting them and giving absolutely nothing in return
  - In their eyes, local church leaders and large landowners were the only people they could trust for protection and justice
Germanic or Germany

• Germanic is a language that is Indo-European (Vandals & Visigoths)
• Germany is a country that exists today, German or Germany came from the word Germanic
THE GERMANS

• Had begun to migrate out of their homeland in Scandinavia and northeastern Russia around 500 BC
  - By 100 BC they occupied most of modern-day Germany
  - Primarily raised sheep and cattle
  - Favorite activity was fighting
• Sometimes organized campaigns to steal stuff or, more commonly, individual raids on neighbors
KINSHIP

• No formal political organization
  - Tied together by bonds of personal loyalty
  • Kinship and lordship

• Kinship
  - Based on clans (large group who were blood relations)
  - Group of clans would join together to form a tribe
    • Maintained cohesion with myth that they all were descended from a legendary hero or god
  - Major function was mutual protection
    • If a person was killed or injured, his kin were expected to get vengeance from the offender or from the offender’s kin group.
LORDSHIP

• Relationship between leader and his retinue of warriors
  - Voluntary relationship

• How it worked
  - Leading man would issue a call to all young warriors who wanted to fight with him
    • Those who answered call would swear to serve leader faithfully in return for his protection and share of spoils
    • Members of different clans would join these bands

• Formed groups of companions, bound to one another and to their leader by oaths
  - Took place outside traditional ties of kinship
DIFFERENTIATION

• Before they began their migration around 500 BC, Germans had a similar language and culture.
  - But after the migrations began, different groups became isolated from one another and differences in language and culture developed.
• By 300 AD, two distinct major groups of Germans had developed.
  - West Germans (Saxons, Franks, and Alemanni who settled along the Roman border of the Rhine River and supported themselves by farming)
  - East Germans (Goths, Vandals, and Lombards who lived in Hungary and southern Russia and supported themselves as nomadic horsemen and herders)
THE GOTHs

• Divided into two sub-groups
  - Visigoths (lived along Danube River)
  - Ostrogoths (lived in southern Russia)

• Developed more advanced form of political organization than other Germans
  - United under strong kings

• Established close contact with Eastern Roman Empire
  - Exposed to Roman/Greek civilization
  - Reason why they were first tribe to convert to Christianity, first to become literate, and first to assume a veneer of civilization
WEST GERMANS

- Primitive
- Large men with red or blond hair, worn long, and blue eyes
- Lived to hunt and fight and, during peaceful times, drank until they passed out
- No central government whatsoever
  - Might choose war leader in times of emergency but, otherwise, unity provided by kinship and lordship
MUTUAL INFLUENCE

- Since the beginning of the Roman Empire, Romans and German barbarians had influenced each other
  - Germans began to enlist in the Roman army in the 3rd century AD
    - Did not join individually
    - Joined in units known as foederati
      - War bands who fought for Rome under their own chieftains
    - Trade also developed between two groups
MILITARY SITUATION

- Germans constantly pressed against Roman borders
  - Sometimes broke through and caused trouble
    - Always ultimately driven back across the border
- Situation sometimes became confusing
  - German foederati fighting German barbarians
“PATRICIANS”

- Manpower shortage caused Rome to relax eligibility requirements in the army so that most soldiers were German mercenaries by 420 AD
  - Many became officers and some even became some commanders
    - Called patricians
      - Emperors became their puppets
    - Some were good rulers
      - Stilicho
  - But the problem remained
    - Dubious loyalty of ill-disciplined, poorly equipped German mercenaries
    - Rome did not really have an army anymore
CHANGE IN TRADITION

• Up until 400, Germans had been satisfied to launch periodic raids into the empire
  - Around 400, entire tribes and groups of tribes (nations) began to move into the empire simultaneously
    - Capturing huge chunks of territory, settling there, and setting up independent kingdoms
THE HUNS

- Huns forced huge German migration
  - Nomadic people from Gobi Desert
  - Expert horsemen
  - Tried to invade China around 370 AD and were defeated
- Then turned westward and ultimately entered northern Europe
  - Terrorized German tribes who lived there
  - Germans migrated en masse to escape them
THE INVASIONS BEGIN

• Visigoths cross Danube River in 375 and ultimately settled in Spain

• 200,000 Sueves, Vandals, and Alans sweep into Gaul and then Spain in 406
  - Allowed to occupy huge chunks of these provinces
  - Vandals then cross Strait of Gilbralter and take control of North Africa and Sicily
In the years that followed, Angles and Saxons took Britain.

Franks took a large portion of Gaul.

Ostrogoths invade Italy.

In 476, the patrician Odovacar deposed the last puppet emperor, Romulus Augustulus, sent imperial regalia to Constantinople, and made himself king of Italy.

Western Empire finished once and for all.
Many barbarian kingdoms would not last long but they did mark the way for the future. Europe, as a unified unit, was finished forever—replaced by a multitude of small, competing entities.
SUMMARY

- In the West, the three vital supports of imperial unity had vanished
  - The position of emperor, the central administration, and the army
- Cities were weakened or destroyed
- Aristocracy, once urban and dependent on the emperor, became rural and virtually independent
NEW BONDS I

• Union of Christians into a unified, increasingly centralized church
  - Rather than a bunch of persecuted individuals

• Christians still superstitious and fairly ignorant bunch
  - But the Church still produced outstanding individuals as Gregory the Great
    • Bishop of Rome
    • Skillful Latin writer and fully capable intellectual who preserved much of Roman culture
NEW BONDS II

• The organization of the countryside into self-sufficient agricultural units
  - Controlled and protected by powerful rural aristocrats who remained reasonable well-educated
NEW BONDS III

Many German leaders created more-or-less formal kingdoms
- Made use of Roman law and administrative structures
- With the exception of Sueves and Vandals, most German invaders sought to conserve rather than totally destroy Roman society
  - Especially true in Gaul and Italy
    - Germans employed Roman aristocrats as administrators in these regions and therefore absorbed and preserved much of the administrative and legal heritage of Rome
Religion & the End of the Roman Empire

- The Roman Empire, as established by Augustus and reorganized by Diocletian and Constantine, lasted for 500 years until it no longer was tenable in the West

- Collapse of Western Empire was not a disaster
  - It was rather a vital step in the development of medieval and modern European civilization
  - Almost impossible for modern society to have evolved from brutal, rigid autocracy and sterile culture of the Late Empire

- Only way to set the foundation for a new society was through the destruction of the old
  - By keeping what was valuable from Rome and discarding the rest
The Romans are no longer a world superpower so what the heck happened?

1. Military Problems
2. Economic Problems
3. Political Problems
4. Social Problems
Social & Political Upheavals

• Civil Wars & Power Struggles
• Invasions
  - Sassanid Persians from the east
  - Germanic tribes into Balkans, Gaul & Spain
• Plague & Economic Problems
  - Labor shortage (military & civilian)
  - Trade, industry & agriculture prod. Decline
  - Roman army begins to hire Germanic warriors
Reforms of Diocletian & Constantine

- Diocletian’s Establishment of Tetrarchy
  - Reforms establish “Late Roman Empire”
  - Divides rule among four leaders
- Constantine moves capitol to Constantinople
  - Formally Byzantium
- Enlargement of bureaucracy & army
  - Better defense for the Empire, but drained economy
- Economic & social policies
  - Workers to remain on their jobs
What were some of the reforms of Constantine?

- Dividing Empire into units
- New capitol
- Enlarge military & civil service
- Establish control over economy & social mobility
New Germanic Kingdoms

- Germanic peoples began moving into lands of the Roman Empire by 3rd century CE
- Western Roman Empire declines & falls
- Replaced by separate & Germanic kings, Romans were excluded from holding power
New Germanic Kingdoms Cont.

- 500 CE settled throughout Europe
  - Visigoths/Spain
  - Ostrogoths/Italy
  - Angles & Saxons/Britain
  - Franks/France & Western Germany

- Clovis emerges as strong military leader & defeats neighboring Germanic tribes
  - Establishes Frankish kingdom (today France & Western Germany)
  - First Germanic leader to convert to Christianity & gains support of the Roman Catholic Church
Carolingian Empire (Charlemagne aka Charles the Great)

- Ruled from 768-814CE
- Expanded Frankish kingdom creating the Carolingian Empire
- Covered much of central & western Europe
- Administration made up of counts (German nobles) & household staff
- *Missi dominici*/messengers of the King would guarantee his orders were carried out
Carolingian Empire
(Charlemagne aka Charles the Great)

• Fierce warrior, strong ruler & pious king
• Promoted learning throughout his kingdom
  - Carolingian Renaissance revived interest in ancient Greeks & Romans
  - Monasteries played central role in cultural renewal
• 800CE the Pope crowned him the emperor of the Romans
  - His coronation strengthened idea of enduring Roman empire & symbolized joining of Roman, Christian & Germanic cultures
Early Rome & the Empire
(Roman Law)

- Romans lived by laws developed through centuries of customs
- This customary law was handed down over generations and applied to citizens (civil law)
- The patricians made decisions and ruled in questions of customary law, giving them an advantage over the plebians
- The plebians agitated to gain more equality and pressed for the law to be written down, so they could anticipate decisions and understand the law
The Twelve Tables

- A committee of ten men produced the Twelve Tables in 449 BCE, documenting the centuries-old customary laws.
- These Twelve Tables became the foundation of Roman law.
- Addressed civil procedure, debt, parents & children, property, marriage, funerals, etc.
From Republic to Empire

- As the Roman republic grew and transformed into an empire, the population became more diverse.
- Legal questions involved Roman citizens as well as non-citizens to whom the civil laws did not apply.
- This led to the development of the “law of nations” that applied to everyone.
Justinian and Byzantine Empire

- Justinian ruled (527-565 CE) the Eastern or Byzantine Empire after the Western Empire collapsed in 476 CE.
- Justinian sought to unify the empire by compiling all Roman law into one document.
- This document became known as “Justinian’s Code.”
Justinian’s Code

- The Code was actually only one of three parts of this compilation
- Addressed marriage, parents, slaves and freedmen, guardianships, adoptions, etc.
- Justinian’s Code was rediscovered, studied, and reproduced in Italy in the 11th century
Why is Justinian’s Code Significant?

- All later systems of law in the West borrowed heavily from it, including English and American law.
- Considered Justinian’s greatest contribution to the history of Western society.
Roman to Byzantine Empire

- Eastern Roman Empire has too much territory to defend far from Constantinople
- Money is low
- Population is declining after the plague
- There are threats from outside the borders
- Islam begins to rise in the Eastern Empire
Islam & the Eastern Roman Empire

- Rise of unified Arab tribes creates a powerful new force
- Muslim armies swept through the Eastern Roman Empire
- Eastern Roman Empire loses Syria & Palestine after defeat of Yarmuk in 636CE
Origins of the Byzantine Empire

• Western Empire falls to Germanic tribes, Eastern Empire continues
• Arabs swept through the East and captured much of the empire’s territory
• By 8th century a smaller Eastern Roman Empire became a unique territory called the Byzantine Empire
  - Greece & Christian Empire
  - Emperor in control of both church & state
Byzantine & Catholic Divide

West
- Home of the Catholic Church
- Church headed by Pope
- Believed Pope was sole head of the Church
- Excommunicated Patriarch Michael Cerularius

East
- Home of Eastern Orthodox Church
- Unwilling to accept Pope’s claim as sole head of church
- Church headed by patriarch appointed by emperor
- Excommunicated Leo IX
- Emperor Leo III outlawed worshipping of images, known as icons