

MEDIEVAL ROMAN CATHOLICISM AND THE SEEDS OF REFORM

Papal Monarchy, Sacramental Consolidation, Dissent, Crisis, and the Eve of Reformation, AD 1054–1516

The Genealogy of Christian Division

A Historical and Biblical Study of Schism, Reformation, and the Making of Modern Christianity

Sixbert SANGWA

ssangwa@openchristian.education

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Abstract

Between the conventional East-West Schism of 1054 and the eve of Luther's public indulgence controversy in 1517, Latin Christianity became more institutionally centralized, theologically systematized, sacramentally regulated, and socially pervasive than it had been in the first millennium. This chapter reconstructs that transformation without reducing the Middle Ages either to an age of unbroken corruption or to an undifferentiated golden age. It traces Gregorian reform, the Investiture Controversy, the growth of papal monarchy and canon law, crusading, the Fourth Crusade and sack of Constantinople, the formalization of the seven-sacrament system, transubstantiation and Eucharistic devotion, penitential theology, purgatory and indulgences, saints and Marian devotion, monastic and mendicant renewal, universities and scholasticism, inquisitorial structures, and late medieval popular piety. It then follows the reform currents associated with the Waldensians, John Wycliffe and the Lollards, Jan Hus and the Hussites, conciliarism, the *Devotio Moderna*, Renaissance humanism, printing, and Erasmus's 1516 Greek New Testament. Particular care is taken to distinguish official doctrine from popular practice, genuine reform from later Protestant appropriation, and historical descent from retrospective claims of ancestry. The chapter argues that the Reformation did not erupt from a religious vacuum. Medieval Latin Christianity generated both the structures later challenged by Protestants and many of the intellectual, pastoral, textual, and institutional resources used to challenge them. A *Sola Scriptura* assessment affirms genuine medieval achievements while testing papal supremacy, sacerdotal mediation, sacramental claims, transubstantiation, purgatory, indulgences, invocation of saints, Marian devotion, coercive religion, and restrictions on preaching and Scripture by the apostolic Word.

Keywords: medieval Catholicism; papal monarchy; sacraments; transubstantiation; indulgences; Waldensians; Wycliffe; Jan Hus

1. Introduction: The West After 1054

The year 1054 is a convenient boundary for this chapter, not because Western Christianity suddenly became a completed medieval Roman Catholic system on that date, but because the widening estrangement between Rome and Constantinople increasingly allowed the Latin West to develop within its own institutional, theological, legal, and devotional ecology. The preceding centuries had already produced stronger Roman claims, distinctive Western canon-law habits, a Latin theological vocabulary shaped heavily by Augustine, and growing divergence in clerical discipline and liturgy. The events of 1054 did not instantaneously sever all communion, yet they marked a stage after which the ecclesiastical history of Western Europe can be followed as an increasingly self-conscious Latin trajectory. The catastrophe of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 would make that separation far more emotionally and politically durable.

The five centuries from 1054 to 1516 were not an empty corridor between the Great Schism and the Protestant Reformation. They were among the most institutionally creative periods in Christian history. The papacy developed a transnational legal and administrative reach that no earlier Roman bishop had exercised in the same routine form. Canon lawyers constructed increasingly coherent systems of ecclesiastical jurisprudence. Monastic reforms and the new mendicant orders pursued poverty, preaching, learning, and pastoral service. Cathedral schools and universities made theology a highly organized intellectual discipline. Scholastic theologians refined doctrines of Trinity, Christology, atonement, grace, sacraments, Eucharist, penance, and ecclesial authority. Parish structures penetrated ordinary life. Pilgrimage, relics, confraternities, processions, saints' cults, Marian devotion, fasting, confession, Mass attendance, and prayers for the dead shaped the religious imagination of millions (Arnold, 2014; Morris, 1989; Swanson, 1995).

The same period also produced tensions that would later become explosive. Reformers attacked simony, clerical sexual misconduct, absenteeism, pluralism, ecclesiastical wealth, poorly educated clergy, and political interference in appointments. Popes asserted universal claims that rulers, bishops, canonists, and eventually conciliarists contested. The penitential system linked confession, satisfaction, purgatory, suffrages, and indulgences in ways that could become pastorally consoling, financially exploitable, or both. Dissenting preachers insisted that the gospel required poverty and vernacular proclamation. Wycliffe challenged papal wealth and transubstantiation. Hus combined moral reform, Czech ecclesiastical conflict, and Wycliffite influence into a movement whose suppression helped provoke revolution in Bohemia. The Western Schism demonstrated that Christians could have multiple papal claimants, each supported by bishops, universities, kingdoms, saints, and canonists. Humanists returned to biblical languages, while printing transformed the speed and scale at which arguments could circulate.

A responsible genealogy must therefore resist two opposite narratives. The first is a confessional caricature in which medieval Christianity appears as five centuries of uninterrupted darkness, with Scripture absent and authentic Christian faith virtually extinguished until Luther. The evidence does not support that picture. Medieval Christians copied and studied Scripture, preached Christ, confessed the Trinity and incarnation, cared for the poor, produced rigorous theology, pursued missionary

work, founded hospitals and schools, and repeatedly called their own institutions to repentance. The second narrative is equally inadequate: that every medieval doctrinal and institutional development can be treated as an organic and therefore authoritative unfolding of apostolic Christianity. Historical continuity does not itself prove biblical fidelity. Some doctrines were defined with a precision the New Testament does not supply, some disciplinary customs became universal obligations, and some claims of ecclesiastical authority expanded far beyond demonstrable first-century patterns.

This chapter therefore follows a two-stage method. It first asks what medieval Latin Christians actually taught, practiced, contested, and reformed, using councils, papal documents, theological works, canon law, chronicles, trial records, devotional literature, and modern scholarship. Only after that historical reconstruction does it ask whether the resulting doctrines and practices accord with Scripture. The theological question is not whether medieval Christians were sincere, learned, ancient, or institutionally continuous. It is whether their claims can withstand the apostolic tests by which every later church must be judged.

2. Sources, Chronology, and Method

The evidence for medieval Latin Christianity is immense and uneven. Papal registers preserve letters, privileges, legal judgments, and administrative decisions. Ecumenical and regional councils provide canons and doctrinal definitions. Canon-law collections reveal how legal principles were systematized and transmitted. Scholastic texts preserve arguments of extraordinary conceptual sophistication but represent trained intellectual elites rather than a direct transcript of ordinary parish belief. Sermons, saints' lives, wills, pilgrimage records, confraternity statutes, art, liturgy, miracle collections, and archaeological evidence give access to popular religion, but they require different interpretive controls. Inquisitorial records preserve voices of dissidents while simultaneously filtering them through hostile questioning and legal categories. Late medieval reformers are likewise known partly through opponents who had reasons to simplify or stigmatize their teaching (Arnold, 2001, 2014; Duffy, 2005; Given, 1997).

The term *medieval Roman Catholicism* is used here genealogically and with caution. Christians in the Latin West understood themselves as the catholic Church in communion with the Roman see, but the fully confessional Roman Catholic identity produced in response to the sixteenth-century Reformation did not yet exist in its later form. Nor had nineteenth-century papal infallibility been defined. The medieval papacy nevertheless advanced increasingly strong claims of universal primacy, and Western sacramental, canonical, and devotional structures developed along lines that became foundational for later Roman Catholic doctrine. It is therefore historically appropriate to trace a Roman Catholic trajectory while refusing to project every modern definition backward unchanged.

The chronology also requires restraint. Institutional growth was rarely linear. A pope might articulate sweeping jurisdictional theory while possessing limited practical control. A council might promulgate a rule that took generations to become normal at parish level. Theological vocabulary could stabilize before popular practice did, or popular devotion could precede official definition. The number of sacraments, for example, was systematized as seven in twelfth-century theology before the Council of Florence gave an explicit conciliar enumeration in 1439. Purgatory likewise drew on much older prayer for the dead and postmortem purification motifs, but its more elaborated Western conceptual geography consolidated during the high Middle Ages (Gurevich, 1983; Le Goff, 1984; Rosemann, 2017).

The same caution applies to reform genealogy. Waldensians were not simply sixteenth-century Protestants born three centuries early. Wycliffe did not create a ready-made Reformation confession, and Lollardy was neither perfectly uniform nor institutionally identical across England. Hus was influenced by Wycliffe but was not merely his Bohemian copy. Humanists such as Erasmus criticized abuses and returned to biblical sources without thereby accepting later Protestant doctrines of justification or ecclesiology. The historian must identify real lines of influence while refusing retrospective ownership of medieval figures by later confessions (Audisio, 1999; Fudge, 2013; Hudson, 1988; Somerset, 2014).

Table 1. Selected chronology of medieval Latin Christianity, AD 1054–1516

Date / period	Development	Genealogical significance
1059	Papal election decree under Nicholas II	Strengthens cardinal role in papal election and reduces direct lay control.
1075	Gregory VII's <i>Dictatus papae</i> entered in papal register	Concise records expansive claims for Roman primacy and papal powers.
1076–1077	Conflict with Henry IV; excommunication and Canossa	Investiture dispute dramatizes conflict between sacerdotal and royal authority.
1095	Urban II preaches crusade at Clermont	Armed pilgrimage, penitential remission, papal leadership, and holy-war ideology converge.

Date / period	Development	Genealogical significance
1122	Concordat of Worms	Compromise distinguishes spiritual investiture from temporal regalia without ending church-state rivalry.
c. 1140	Gratian's Decretum	Canon law becomes a major scholastic and administrative discipline.
c. 1170s–1184	Poor of Lyons emerge; later condemnation at Verona	Vernacular preaching and apostolic poverty become enduring dissent currents.
1204	Fourth Crusade sacks Constantinople	Deepens Latin-Greek estrangement and leaves a lasting memory of religiously legitimated conquest.
1215	Fourth Lateran Council	High point of Innocent III's papal program; transubstantiation named, annual confession required, anti-heresy policy strengthened.
1230s	Papally delegated inquisitors become established	Anti-heresy enforcement develops specialized judicial machinery.
1264	Urban IV extends feast of Corpus Christi	Eucharistic devotion becomes increasingly public and visual.
1302	Boniface VIII issues Unam sanctam	Formulates an especially strong medieval claim for papal necessity and supremacy.
1309–1377	Papal residence at Avignon	Administrative centralization grows while criticism of papal finance and political dependence intensifies.
1347–1351	Black Death devastates Europe	Mortality, clerical disruption, fear, charity, penitence, and devotional change intensify.
1378–1417	Western Schism	Rival papal obediences create a severe crisis of visible authority.
1382	Wycliffite teachings condemned in England	Scriptural authority, Eucharist, clerical wealth, and ecclesiology become organized reform fault lines.
1409	Council of Pisa	Attempt to end two papal obediences produces a third claimant.
1414–1418	Council of Constance	Ends Western Schism, condemns Hus, and gives major expression to conciliar reform theory.
1439	Council of Florence	Temporary East-West reunion formula; explicit conciliar enumeration of seven sacraments for Armenians.
c. 1454–1455	Gutenberg Bible	Movable-type printing demonstrates capacity for large-scale production of Scripture and books.
1457	Unitas Fratrum founded in Bohemia/Moravia	A durable community emerges from the Hussite reform environment.
1478	Spanish Inquisition authorized	Royally directed tribunal, distinct from earlier papal inquisition, becomes a major late medieval institution.
1512–1517	Fifth Lateran Council	Reform, conciliar authority, preaching, and ecclesiastical governance remain unresolved on the eve of Reformation.
1516	Erasmus publishes Novum Instrumentum omne	First published Greek New Testament gives biblical humanism a powerful textual instrument.

MEDIEVAL LATIN CHRISTIANITY

Selected milestones, AD 1054–1516



1059	Papal election decree
1075	Dictatus papae
1077	Canossa
1095	Clermont / First Crusade
1122	Concordat of Worms
1140	Gratian, Decretum (c.)
1175	Poor of Lyons / Waldensian origins (c.)
1204	Sack of Constantinople
1215	Fourth Lateran Council
1231	Gregory IX anti-heresy legislation
1264	Corpus Christi extended by Urban IV
1302	Unam sanctam
1309	Papacy settles at Avignon
1348	Black Death across Western Europe
1378	Western Schism begins
1382	Wycliffite teachings condemned
1409	Council of Pisa: three obediences
1415	Hus executed at Constance
1417	Martin V elected; Schism ends
1439	Council of Florence / seven-sacrament formula
1455	Gutenberg Bible (c.)
1457	Unitas Fratrum founded
1478	Spanish Inquisition authorized
1512	Fifth Lateran Council begins
1516	Erasmus, Novum Instrumentum

Figure 1. Selected milestones in medieval Latin Christianity, AD 1054–1516.

Note. Dates mark turning points rather than instantaneous transformations. Institutional reception and local practice often developed over decades.

3. What Existed After 1054: The Inheritance of the Latin West

The Latin Church that entered the later eleventh century was already far more structured than the apostolic communities described in the New Testament. Dioceses were organized under bishops; metropolitan hierarchies linked provinces; monasteries owned land and exercised social influence; liturgical books regulated worship; canon collections transmitted conciliar and papal rules; the Eucharist stood at the center of Christian worship; baptism ordinarily occurred in infancy;

penitential practice had a long history; and Rome possessed a prestige that Western reformers increasingly translated into jurisdictional claims. At the same time, the church did not function as a modern centralized state. Kings appointed or heavily influenced bishops, noble families controlled monasteries and benefices, regional customs differed, and communications limited the speed with which Roman decisions could be implemented (Blumenthal, 1988; Morris, 1989).

The social order of Western Europe was equally decisive. Bishops and abbots could be major landholders and political actors. Ecclesiastical offices carried revenues, patronage, and legal privileges, so appointments attracted secular interest. The problem later called *lay investiture* arose from this mixed world. A bishop was not merely a preacher and sacramental minister. He might also receive lands, exercise jurisdiction, advise a ruler, and hold obligations comparable to other great lords. Kings therefore regarded participation in episcopal appointment as integral to government, while reformers increasingly regarded the handing of ring and staff by lay rulers as a dangerous subordination of spiritual office to secular power.

Reform was not invented by Gregory VII. Monastic centers such as Cluny had already promoted stricter observance, liturgical seriousness, and freedom from local lay domination. Earlier popes and emperors had challenged simony and clerical disorder. The eleventh-century movement conventionally called the Gregorian Reform was therefore a network of reform currents rather than the personal program of a single pope. Its distinctive achievement was to connect moral reform of clergy with a more ambitious theory of Roman authority. If the church was to be freed from domination by secular patrons, reformers increasingly reasoned, it required an ecclesiastical center able to discipline bishops, protect elections, hear appeals, and confront rulers (Cowdrey, 1998; Howe, 2025; Morris, 1989).

This starting point matters because papal monarchy and reform were not simple opposites. Centralization often grew through genuine efforts to correct abuses. The historical question is therefore not whether medieval popes ever reformed the church. Many clearly did. The deeper question is how a reforming instrument became a theory and structure of universal government, and whether the resulting claims can be identified with the authority Christ gave to Peter and the apostles.

4. Gregorian Reform, Investiture, and the Rise of Papal Monarchy

4.1 Reforming the clergy: simony, marriage, and freedom from lay control

Three issues repeatedly appeared in eleventh-century reform rhetoric: simony, clerical sexual discipline, and lay control of ecclesiastical office. *Simony*, named from Simon Magus in [Acts 8:18–24](#), meant the buying or selling of spiritual office or sacred things. The biblical condemnation of purchasing God’s gift gave reformers a powerful scriptural language for attacking appointments in which office and money were entangled. Yet medieval simony could be difficult to define in practice because gifts, feudal obligations, patronage, and office revenues overlapped within a society where secular and ecclesiastical institutions were deeply intertwined.

Clerical marriage and continence were another target. The Western church had long valued clerical celibacy, but practice varied. Reforming synods increasingly insisted that priests and higher clergy abstain from marriage or marital relations, and twelfth-century legislation strengthened the canonical prohibition. The rationale combined ascetic ideals, ritual purity, ecclesiastical property concerns, and a desire to distinguish clergy from hereditary lay lordship. These reforms could correct real patterns of sexual exploitation and dynastic control, but they also universalized an ascetical discipline that the New Testament presents as a gift rather than a mandatory qualification for all elders or overseers.

The third issue, lay investiture, became the constitutional crisis. Reformers objected to lay rulers conferring ring and pastoral staff, symbols associated with spiritual office. Rulers countered that bishops received lands and public responsibilities that could not be separated from royal government. The dispute therefore involved theology, property, law, political order, and symbolism at once. It was never merely a quarrel over ceremonial objects (Blumenthal, 1988; Cowdrey, 1998).

4.2 Gregory VII and the *Dictatus papae*

Hildebrand, elected Pope Gregory VII in 1073, became the emblematic figure of the reform movement because he pressed its logic with unusual consistency. A group of propositions entered in the papal register in 1075 and conventionally called the *Dictatus papae* asserted, among other claims, the unique foundation of the Roman Church, the pope’s authority to depose or reinstate bishops, distinctive Roman judicial privileges, and powers extending even to the deposition of emperors. Historians debate precisely how the propositions functioned and whether they constituted a public legislative manifesto, but they unmistakably reveal the conceptual horizon of Gregorian papalism (Gregory VII, 1075; Cowdrey, 1998; Morris, 1989).

The conflict with the German king Henry IV made the theory concrete. Henry depended on bishops in imperial government and resisted papal interference with appointments. Gregory excommunicated him in 1076 after a breakdown that included

Henry's attempt to declare Gregory deposed. The political consequences were severe because German princes could use excommunication to question the king's legitimacy. In January 1077 Henry crossed the Alps and sought reconciliation at Canossa, where, after a dramatic period of penance, Gregory absolved him. Later medieval memory transformed Canossa into a symbol of papal triumph over empire, but the actual conflict continued. Gregory again excommunicated Henry, Henry supported a rival pope, and Gregory died in exile in 1085. Canossa therefore demonstrated papal capacity to discipline a ruler, but not a stable papal conquest of monarchy.

The episode nevertheless changed Western political theology. Popes increasingly claimed that the spiritual office possessed a superior responsibility when temporal rulers endangered the church or salvation. Kings and imperial lawyers developed counterarguments defending divinely ordained royal authority. The resulting competition stimulated legal and political thought on both sides and made the relation of *sacerdotium* and *regnum*, priestly and royal authority, a central problem of medieval Europe (Morris, 1989; Tierney, 1998).

4.3 The Concordat of Worms: compromise without resolution

The Investiture Controversy did not end with Gregory and Henry. A working compromise emerged in the Concordat of Worms in 1122 between Emperor Henry V and Pope Calixtus II. The emperor renounced investiture with ring and staff and accepted canonical election, while arrangements preserved a royal role in disputed elections and the conferral of temporal regalia. The settlement distinguished more clearly between spiritual office and temporal rights without pretending that bishops had ceased to inhabit both spheres.

Worms mattered genealogically because it reinforced the principle that ecclesiastical office could not be treated simply as a royal possession. Yet it did not create a modern separation of church and state. Medieval popes continued to intervene in political affairs, rulers influenced church appointments, bishops exercised secular power, and conflicts over taxation, jurisdiction, and sovereignty persisted. Reform had redrawn the boundary rather than eliminating the overlap.

4.4 Canon law, appeals, legates, and the machinery of centralization

Papal monarchy became durable not only through dramatic confrontations but through law. Around the 1140s, the jurist traditionally known as Gratian assembled the *Decretum*, a vast concordance of canons that became foundational for the academic study of canon law. Gratian was not promulgating a papal code in the modern sense. His work was a private scholarly compilation, but it organized centuries of conciliar, patristic, and papal material into a teachable legal science. Later papal decretals, especially the *Liber Extra* promulgated by Gregory IX in 1234, integrated new papal rulings into an increasingly systematic body of law (Brundage, 1995; Morris, 1989).

Legal centralization changed everyday ecclesial life. Bishops, monasteries, clergy, rulers, and lay litigants could appeal to Rome. Papal legates acted across kingdoms. The curia developed administrative offices, documentary procedures, and fiscal systems. Dispensations and provisions allowed Rome to intervene in local appointments. This expansion often protected parties from local domination and gave a transregional institution means to discipline abuses. It could also produce delay, expense, resentment, and the impression that ecclesiastical life was governed through a distant legal bureaucracy.

This is one reason the phrase *papal monarchy* must be used carefully. Colin Morris's influential formulation describes a real concentration of Western ecclesial authority in the papacy between roughly 1050 and 1250, but the papacy was not a modern territorial monarchy exercising uniform bureaucratic control over every parish. Its power was relational and juridical, often activated by appeals and petitions. Recent scholarship therefore emphasizes both the extraordinary growth of papal claims and the dialogical mechanisms through which local actors helped make papal government effective (Bird, 2025; Morris, 1989).

4.5 Innocent III and the high point of papal government

The pontificate of Innocent III from 1198 to 1216 represents a high point of medieval papal ambition and administrative competence. Trained in law and theology, Innocent intervened in disputed royal elections, marriage cases, episcopal appointments, crusading policy, heresy, and reform. He described the papal office in elevated terms and treated Rome as the supreme court of Western Christendom. Yet he also summoned one of the most consequential reform councils of the Middle Ages, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which addressed doctrine, clerical conduct, confession, Eucharistic teaching, crusade, education, pastoral care, Jewish-Christian social boundaries, and heresy (Tanner, 1990).

Innocent's pontificate reveals the double character of papal centralization. The same institution that promoted education, pastoral discipline, and reform also expanded coercive authority and universal jurisdiction. The Fourth Lateran Council required annual confession and Easter communion, gave formal expression to transubstantiation, and strengthened measures

against heresy. It became one of the clearest moments at which doctrine, pastoral government, canon law, and papal leadership converged into a mature medieval system.

4.6 Boniface VIII and the limits of universal papal claims

The trajectory toward stronger papal monarchy did not proceed without resistance. Boniface VIII's conflict with Philip IV of France at the turn of the fourteenth century arose from taxation, jurisdiction over clergy, and competing theories of sovereignty. In the bull *Unam sanctam* of 1302, Boniface presented one of the strongest medieval formulations of papal supremacy, insisting on the unity of the Church under one head and linking submission to the Roman pontiff with salvation. The text belongs to a specific political controversy, but its language cannot be reduced to diplomacy. It articulates a theological theory of universal papal necessity (Boniface VIII, 1302; Oakley, 2003).

The political response showed how far theory and effective power had diverged. In 1303 agents associated with Philip confronted Boniface at Anagni. The pope was soon released but died shortly afterward. Within a few years the papal court relocated to Avignon. The episode did not end papal primacy, but it exposed the limits of a model in which spiritual supremacy was expected to translate straightforwardly into control over increasingly consolidated monarchies.

The genealogy is therefore more complex than a steady ascent from Peter to medieval monarchy. Roman primacy was old; universal jurisdiction developed over centuries; reform supplied centralization with moral energy; canon law made it administratively effective; strong popes extended it; and kings, bishops, lawyers, councils, and circumstances repeatedly limited it. The historical development is real. Whether the resulting claims represent a legitimate implication of apostolic authority is a separate biblical question addressed later in this chapter.

5. Crusading Christendom: Reform, Penitence, Violence, and the East-West Wound

5.1 Clermont in 1095 and the fusion of pilgrimage with warfare

The First Crusade emerged from a world in which pilgrimage, penitence, papal reform, aristocratic warfare, Byzantine-Latin diplomacy, and concern for eastern Christians could converge. In November 1095 Pope Urban II preached at Clermont after Emperor Alexios I Komnenos had sought Western military assistance against Turkish pressure. The surviving versions of Urban's speech differ and were written after the event, so no single later reconstruction should be treated as a verbatim transcript. What is clear from contemporary evidence is that Urban called Western Christians to armed service in the East and attached extraordinary penitential remission to participation. Crusading thus transformed warfare into a penitential religious act under ecclesiastical authorization (Peters, 1998; Riley-Smith, 1999; Tyerman, 2006).

The movement cannot be explained by one motive. Some participants were driven by devotion, concern for holy places, desire to aid Christians in the East, fear of judgment, family strategies, lordship, adventure, or material expectation. The older caricature that crusaders were primarily landless younger sons seeking easy wealth is inadequate, not least because crusading was expensive and often financially ruinous. Neither should devotional motives be romanticized. Religious conviction could intensify violence rather than restrain it. The capture of Jerusalem in 1099 was accompanied by mass killing, and crusading enthusiasm had already produced massacres of Jewish communities in the Rhineland. Christian zeal and grave moral evil could occupy the same historical movement.

The success of the First Crusade created Latin states in the eastern Mediterranean and strengthened papal capacity to mobilize Western Christians across political boundaries. It also normalized a theological category that would endure for centuries: armed expedition could be treated not merely as a permissible war but as an ecclesiastically privileged penitential act. The crusader's vow, cross, pilgrimage, confession, and indulgence linked military action to the church's developing economy of penance.

5.2 From Jerusalem to Iberia, the Baltic, and internal crusade

Crusading soon expanded beyond the original eastern expedition. Popes extended crusading privileges to campaigns in Iberia against Muslim polities and, later, to the Baltic against non-Christian peoples. The vocabulary and legal privileges of crusade were also applied to armed campaigns against groups within Latin Christendom judged heretical or politically threatening. This expansion matters because it reveals that crusade was not simply a defensive emergency generated by one frontier. It became an adaptable institution through which the papacy could mobilize violence, taxation, preaching, vows, and indulgences for projects defined as defense or expansion of the faith (Housley, 2012; Riley-Smith, 1999).

The Albigensian Crusade beginning in 1209 is a particularly important example. It targeted dissident populations in southern France associated by church authorities with Cathar or Albigensian heresy. Modern historians debate how coherent and institutionally unified medieval ‘Catharism’ actually was because many descriptions survive through hostile clerical sources. That debate does not erase the fact of organized dissent, but it warns against reconstructing a single alternative church too confidently from inquisitorial and polemical categories. What is indisputable is that anti-heretical policy moved from preaching and legal condemnation to large-scale military coercion, with devastating consequences for communities in Languedoc (Arnold, 2001; Moore, 2007).

This institutional migration from external crusade to internal coercion had long-term genealogical significance. A church that once endured persecution had, through alliance with Christian rulers and the development of canon law, acquired mechanisms for identifying religious deviation as an offense with temporal consequences. Medieval defenders understood coercion as protection of souls and Christian society. From a biblical standpoint, however, the question is whether the Church of Christ is authorized to compel doctrinal conformity through the sword. That question becomes even sharper in the history of inquisition below.

5.3 The Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople, 1204

The Fourth Crusade produced one of the deepest wounds in the history of East-West Christianity. Initially proclaimed for the recovery of Jerusalem, the expedition became entangled in Venetian finance, the attack on Christian Zara, and a Byzantine dynastic struggle. Crusaders eventually assaulted Constantinople in April 1204, plundered churches and palaces, seized relics, and established a Latin Empire. The event cannot be blamed on a single actor or reduced to a preplanned papal scheme. Pope Innocent III had forbidden attacks on Christians in principle and reacted critically to the sack, even while later accommodating the Latin political and ecclesiastical order that resulted. The moral responsibility of the crusading host and its leaders nevertheless remains substantial (Phillips, 2004).

The long-term ecclesial consequences were larger than the immediate conquest. Greeks who already disputed Latin papal claims and liturgical customs now possessed a memory of Latin Christians desecrating the capital of Eastern Christianity under crusading banners. Latin patriarchal structures were imposed in conquered territories, while Greek clergy and laity experienced dispossession. The political empire created in 1204 lasted only until 1261, but the memory outlived it. The conventional schism of 1054 had been a conflict among church leaders whose censures did not instantly end every relationship. The sack of 1204 helped turn theological estrangement into civilizational trauma.

The episode also exposes a recurring problem in the genealogy of Christian division: institutions can invoke Christian goals while acting in ways that contradict Christian ethics. The claim that an expedition is sacred does not sanctify every means. Historical Christianity repeatedly requires a distinction between what churches authorized and what Scripture authorizes.

5.4 Crusading indulgences and the financialization of penitential participation

Crusading also contributed to the history of indulgences. Early crusaders received remission connected to the penitential burden of their expedition. As crusading institutions developed, participation could take forms other than personal military service. Financial contributions, the redemption or commutation of vows, and support for those who physically went on campaign increasingly became associated with partial or plenary indulgences under papal authority. Theologians did not universally understand these practices in crude transactional terms. Serious medieval treatments emphasized contrition, confession, proper intention, and the distinction between forgiveness of guilt and remission of temporal penalties. Yet the association between money, crusade finance, ecclesiastical authorization, and spiritual benefit created a structure vulnerable to misunderstanding and abuse (Housley, 2012; Meens, 2014).

By the late fifteenth century, crusading indulgence campaigns against the Ottoman threat required sophisticated systems of preaching, certificates, collectors, and financial administration. Such practices did not begin with Luther’s generation. What changed by 1517 was the scale, publicity, print culture, and theological controversy surrounding them. The Reformation dispute over indulgences therefore had deep medieval roots rather than being a reaction to an isolated late abuse.

6. The Making of a Seven-Sacrament System

6.1 From many sacred signs to a defined sacramental number

The Latin word *sacramentum* had been used broadly in earlier Christianity for sacred mysteries, signs, rites, and realities. Medieval theologians inherited baptism and the Eucharist as unquestionably central rites, together with confirmation,

ordination, marriage, anointing of the sick, confession, and many other sacred actions. The doctrinal task was to determine which rites should be classified in the strongest sense as sacraments and how they conveyed grace.

The twelfth century was decisive. Hugh of St Victor and other theologians developed more systematic definitions, while Peter Lombard's *Sentences* became especially influential. In Book IV, Lombard identified seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and marriage. He described a sacrament not merely as a sign but as a sign related causally to grace. Because the *Sentences* became the standard theological textbook on which generations of masters commented, the sevenfold scheme acquired enormous intellectual stability (Rosemann, 2004, 2017).

The emergence of seven must not be narrated as though a council suddenly invented seven sacraments in one session. The number stabilized through theological reflection, liturgical practice, canon law, and ecclesiastical teaching. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 gave major definitions concerning Eucharist and confession but did not itself provide the later standard conciliar list of seven. The Council of Florence's 1439 decree for the Armenians explicitly enumerated the seven and described them as containing and conferring grace when worthily received. The Council of Trent would later define the seven against Protestant objections. Historical sequence therefore matters: practice preceded systematic number; scholastic synthesis preceded late medieval conciliar enumeration; Reformation controversy prompted still later dogmatic precision (Council of Florence, 1439; Rosemann, 2017).

Table 2. The seven-sacrament system: medieval function, biblical referents, and historical development

Sacrament in mature Latin system	Principal medieval function	Clear biblical practice or theme	Historical observation
Baptism	Initiation, regeneration, forgiveness, incorporation	Matthew 28:19–20 ; Romans 6:3–4 ; 1 Peter 3:21	Apostolic rite; medieval theology increasingly systematized infant administration and sacramental efficacy.
Confirmation	Strengthening by the Spirit; ecclesial maturation	Acts 8:14–17 ; Acts 19:5–6	Developed from initiation/layers of anointing and laying on of hands; became more distinct in the Latin West.
Eucharist	Communion with Christ; sacrificial memorial/presence	Luke 22:19–20 ; 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 ; 1 Corinthians 11:23–29	Apostolic rite; transubstantiation and sacrificial metaphysics were later Western explanations.
Penance	Reconciliation after post-baptismal sin	John 20:23 ; James 5:16 ; 1 John 1:9	Confession is biblical; annual priestly confession and the satisfaction system are later institutional developments.
Anointing of the sick	Healing and preparation for death	James 5:14–16	Biblical anointing exists; medieval 'extreme unction' narrowed practice toward the dying.
Holy orders	Ordained ministry and sacramental priesthood	Acts 14:23 ; 1 Timothy 3 ; Titus 1	Ordered ministry is apostolic; a distinct sacrificing priesthood developed beyond New Testament office terminology.
Matrimony	Grace for lifelong Christian marriage	Matthew 19:4–6 ; Ephesians 5:22–33	Marriage is biblical and holy; its formal placement among seven sacraments was a medieval classification.

6.2 Baptism and confirmation

Medieval Western baptism was ordinarily administered to infants and understood as remitting sin, regenerating the recipient, incorporating the baptized into the Church, and imprinting an indelible character. Emergency baptism could be performed by laypersons under specified conditions. The ancient connection between initiation and the bishop's laying on of hands developed in the West into a more distinct rite of confirmation, normally reserved to the bishop, while Eastern Christianity continued to administer chrismation more directly with baptism. This difference illustrates how a shared early practice could develop into distinct sacramental disciplines without one moment of deliberate division.

Theologically, medieval baptismal teaching drew on texts such as [John 3:5](#), [Acts 2:38](#), [Romans 6:3–4](#), [Titus 3:5](#), and [1 Peter 3:21](#). The main later Protestant disagreements would concern the relationship among sign, faith, regeneration, covenant, and infant reception, not whether baptism belonged to Christian obedience at all.

6.3 Holy orders and the strengthening of sacerdotal identity

The medieval priesthood became increasingly defined through sacramental ordination and the priest's unique capacity to consecrate the Eucharist and absolve sins. This strengthened a distinction between clergy and laity that had roots in earlier

episcopal Christianity but acquired additional theological density as sacramental theory matured. Bishops possessed the fullness of ordination in later Catholic articulation, priests acted as Eucharistic and penitential ministers, and deacons occupied a subordinate sacramental order.

The language of *sacerdos*, priest, drew connections between Christian ministry and sacrificial categories. The New Testament can use priestly language corporately for believers in Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6) and identifies Christ as the definitive high priest (Hebrews 7:23–28). Medieval theology did not deny Christ’s unique priesthood. It interpreted ordained ministry as participation in it. The biblical question is whether Scripture authorizes the degree of sacerdotal mediation that later attached forgiveness and Eucharistic sacrifice to a distinct sacramental priesthood.

6.4 Marriage as sacrament and the expansion of church jurisdiction

Marriage became one of the seven sacraments in the mature Western system and also a major field of canon law. The church asserted jurisdiction over valid consent, impediments, prohibited degrees of kinship, legitimacy, and marital disputes. Twelfth-century canonists and theologians increasingly emphasized consent as constitutive of marriage, an important development in a society where families and property interests could exert enormous pressure on unions (Brundage, 1995).

Sacramentalization did not make medieval marriage socially simple. Lordship, dowry, inheritance, clandestine unions, annulment disputes, and gender hierarchy remained powerful realities. Yet ecclesiastical insistence that the mutual consent of the man and woman mattered created a legal principle capable at times of resisting forced marriage. Here, as elsewhere, doctrinal development could contain both an institutional expansion of church jurisdiction and a genuine pastoral protection.

6.5 Anointing of the sick and the movement toward ‘extreme unction’

James 5:14–16 instructs elders to pray over the sick and anoint them with oil in the Lord’s name. Medieval practice increasingly associated this rite with preparation for death, producing the term *extreme unction*, the final anointing. Its sacramental interpretation connected bodily illness, forgiveness, and final preparation for judgment. The narrowing of anointing toward the dying differed from the broader New Testament setting of prayer for healing, although later Roman Catholic reform would recover the wider designation ‘anointing of the sick.’

6.6 Penance: from repentance to a sacramental architecture

Penance became one of the most consequential medieval sacraments because it organized Christian life after baptism. Earlier Christianity had long practiced confession, reconciliation, fasting, almsgiving, and ecclesiastical discipline. Medieval scholasticism systematized the process into contrition, confession, absolution, and satisfaction. The penitent was to grieve sin, confess to a priest, receive absolution, and perform acts of satisfaction such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, or almsgiving. The theology distinguished guilt from temporal consequences, thereby creating conceptual space for indulgences and purgatory.

The Fourth Lateran Council’s Canon 21, *Omnis utriusque sexus*, required every Christian who had reached the age of discretion to confess sins at least annually to his or her own priest and receive the Eucharist at least at Easter. This did not invent private confession, but it universalized an annual minimum and stimulated a major pastoral literature for confessors. Handbooks taught clergy how to question penitents and evaluate intention, circumstances, and restitution. The result was a more individualized moral scrutiny than stereotypes of medieval collectivism sometimes suggest (Garrison, 2017; Meens, 2014; Tanner, 1990).

The system sought to take sin seriously and provide assurance of ecclesial reconciliation. It also concentrated extraordinary spiritual power in priestly mediation. The distinction between divine forgiveness, ecclesiastical absolution, satisfaction, and temporal penalty became central to the later controversy over whether repentance had been transformed into a juridical and sacramental process more elaborate than the apostolic gospel.

7. Eucharist, Transubstantiation, and the Expansion of Eucharistic Devotion

7.1 The medieval inheritance of real presence

Medieval Eucharistic theology did not begin with the idea that the bread and wine were bare symbols. Patristic and early medieval writers had long spoken in strongly realist terms about participation in Christ’s body and blood. The controversy was how to explain that reality. Debates surrounding figures such as Berengar of Tours in the eleventh century showed that Western theologians were seeking conceptual language capable of affirming both sacramental signs and Christ’s true presence without collapsing one into the other.

By the twelfth century the term *transubstantiation* was increasingly used to describe the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 employed the term in its first canon, confessing that Christ's body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament under the appearances of bread and wine, with the bread transubstantiated into the body and the wine into the blood by divine power. This is an important chronological boundary. The council did not invent belief in Christ's real Eucharistic presence, but it gave conciliar authority to a specific term of conversion (Macy, 1994; Tanner, 1990).

7.2 Aquinas and the metaphysics of substance and accidents

Later scholastic theology explained transubstantiation with greater philosophical precision. Thomas Aquinas employed Aristotelian categories of substance and accidents to argue that the underlying substance of bread and wine is converted while sensible properties such as taste, color, quantity, and texture remain. Aquinas did not mean that the Eucharist could be analyzed empirically as hidden flesh under bread-like chemistry. He was offering a metaphysical account in which the sacramental appearances remain while the deepest ontological reality changes by divine action.

The distinction matters because later polemics often attack a crude physical transformation that medieval scholastics themselves did not teach. At the same time, the biblical-theological question remains whether Scripture requires this metaphysical explanation. The words of institution, [1 Corinthians 10:16–17](#), and [1 Corinthians 11:23–29](#) demand a serious theology of communion with Christ. They do not explicitly articulate the later substance-accidents model.

7.3 The Mass as sacrifice

Medieval Eucharistic theology also described the Mass sacrificially. The mature Catholic understanding did not claim that Christ is repeatedly crucified. Rather, the one sacrifice of Christ was understood as sacramentally represented and made present through the Eucharistic offering. Priests were said to offer the sacrament for the living and the dead, and Mass intentions became integrated into networks of patronage, chantries, anniversaries, and prayers for souls.

This distinction should be represented accurately before criticism. The strongest Catholic claim is not 'Christ's sacrifice was insufficient, so priests sacrifice him again.' It is that the once-for-all sacrifice becomes sacramentally present without bloody repetition. The Protestant objection that later emerged was nevertheless serious: the epistle to the Hebrews repeatedly contrasts Christ's once-for-all self-offering with repeated priestly sacrifice ([Hebrews 7:27](#); [Hebrews 9:11–14, 24–28](#); [Hebrews 10:10–14](#)). Whether sacramental representation protects or blurs that finality became one of the Reformation's central disputes.

7.4 Elevation, adoration, Corpus Christi, and visual devotion

As Eucharistic theology intensified, so did devotion to the consecrated host. The elevation of the host during Mass became a focal moment of visual piety. Consecrated elements could be reserved and adored. Eucharistic miracle stories circulated. The feast of Corpus Christi, promoted especially through the visions and advocacy associated with Juliana of Liège, received papal extension by Urban IV in 1264 and later became widely celebrated. Processions carried the host through towns, making Eucharistic presence a public expression of Christian civic identity (Rubin, 1991).

These practices demonstrate that medieval religion was not merely doctrinal assent. It was embodied through sight, procession, bells, architecture, music, gesture, calendars, and sacred space. For many laypeople who communicated sacramentally less often than modern Catholics, seeing the elevated host could become a central devotional act. This divergence between attendance at Mass and frequency of reception helps explain why Lateran IV had to require at least annual communion.

The later medieval West also increasingly administered communion to laypeople under the form of bread alone, while clergy normally received both bread and wine. Catholic theology held that the whole Christ is present under either species. Hussite insistence on communion under both kinds would turn this disciplinary practice into a major ecclesiastical fault line in the fifteenth century.

8. Purgatory, Indulgences, and the Medieval Economy of Penitence

8.1 Older prayers for the dead and the consolidation of purgatory

Christians had prayed for the dead long before the high Middle Ages, and patristic writers contained diverse ideas about postmortem purification. What developed in the medieval West was a more coherent doctrine and devotional geography in which souls dying in God's grace but still needing purification underwent a temporary postmortem cleansing before the beatific vision. Historians continue to debate how sharply one should speak of the 'birth' of purgatory in the twelfth century.

Jacques Le Goff emphasized the emergence of *purgatorium* as a distinct place and system, while critics such as Aron Gurevich stressed that popular and liturgical patterns of postmortem purification cannot be reduced to an intellectual invention by theologians. The safer conclusion is developmental: older practices and motifs were gradually consolidated into a more defined Western doctrine during the high Middle Ages (Gurevich, 1983; Le Goff, 1984).

Purgatory transformed the relationship between living and dead. Masses, prayers, alms, anniversaries, chantries, confraternities, and indulgences could be directed toward souls believed to be undergoing purification. This created powerful bonds across death and gave grief a disciplined religious language. It also generated institutions funded by donations and bequests intended to secure continuing intercession. Spiritual care and economic structures became difficult to separate.

8.2 Guilt, temporal punishment, and satisfaction

The logic of indulgences cannot be understood without the distinction between the guilt of sin and its temporal consequences. In medieval penitential theology, sacramental absolution could remit guilt and eternal punishment while temporal penalties or satisfactions remained. Penance addressed the disorder created by sin through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, restitution, pilgrimage, and other works. Purgatory extended the logic beyond death when satisfaction was understood to remain incomplete.

This framework was not simply a doctrine that forgiveness could be purchased. Serious theologians insisted that indulgences presupposed repentance and ecclesial reconciliation. Contemporary Roman Catholic teaching still defines an indulgence not as forgiveness of unforgiven guilt but as remission of temporal punishment due to sin whose guilt has already been forgiven (Catholic Church, 1997, para. 1471). Historical abuses are therefore best criticized after the official distinction is understood rather than by attributing to the tradition a doctrine it formally rejects.

8.3 The treasury of merits and papal dispensation

As indulgence theology matured, the Church was increasingly said to dispense a treasury of spiritual goods grounded in the infinite merits of Christ and, in a derivative way, the merits of saints united to him. Papal authority could apply this treasury to remit temporal penalties under specified conditions. Clement VI's fourteenth-century teaching helped give the treasury concept a more explicit papal formulation, although theories of indulgences remained debated and developed over time. (Catholic Church, 1997, paras. 1476–1477; Le Goff, 1984).

Theologically, this was meant to express communion in Christ rather than a competitive account in which saints add something lacking in Christ. Yet the construction raises a biblical question: does the New Testament present ecclesiastical rulers as administrators of a quantifiable or juridically transferable treasury of satisfactions? The apostolic letters certainly teach mutual prayer, burden-bearing, generosity, and participation in Christ's body. They do not plainly teach a papally dispensable store of meritorious satisfaction.

8.4 Indulgence preaching, money, and the danger of spiritual transaction

In practice, indulgences became linked with pilgrimage, crusades, church construction, charitable works, and financial contributions. The relationship between almsgiving and spiritual benefit had deep Christian roots, but the administrative scale of late medieval indulgence campaigns made confusion increasingly likely. Preachers might carefully distinguish contrition, absolution, and indulgence; hearers could nevertheless experience the transaction through a certificate, prescribed contribution, or promised spiritual benefit. Fiscal systems and spiritual promises could therefore reinforce one another even when official theology denied that grace itself was for sale.

By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, printed indulgence forms and organized campaigns were well established. One of the earliest dated products of European printing was itself an indulgence associated with crusade financing. This fact is historically striking: the technology that would later amplify Protestant criticism was already serving the financial and devotional machinery Protestant writers would attack (Neville-Sington, 2008).

The Reformation conflict over indulgences was therefore not created by a theological misunderstanding alone. It emerged from a real institutional intersection of penitential doctrine, papal authority, preaching, finance, pastoral fear, and mass communication. To understand 1517, the system must be reconstructed as a coherent medieval whole before evaluating whether that whole was apostolically warranted.

9. Saints, Relics, Mary, Pilgrimage, and Popular Religion

9.1 Official theology and lived devotion must be distinguished

Medieval Christianity was experienced not only through councils and university theology but through a dense sacred world of saints' days, shrines, relics, processions, local patrons, miracle stories, images, candles, confraternities, pilgrimages, blessings, and prayers. These practices varied enormously across regions and social classes. Historians therefore distinguish normative theology from lived religion. A village custom cannot automatically be treated as official doctrine, while a conciliar definition cannot be assumed to describe what every layperson understood. Both levels belong to the history, but they answer different questions (Arnold, 2014; Swanson, 1995).

Medieval people often understood saints through the doctrine of the communion of saints. Those already with God were believed to intercede for Christians on earth. Local shrines made heavenly patronage tangible, and relics provided material connections with holy persons whose bodies were expected to rise. The current Catechism of the Catholic Church continues to distinguish veneration from the adoration owed to God and teaches the intercession of saints as subordinate to the unique mediation of Christ (Catholic Church, 1997, paras. 956–957). This distinction should be acknowledged historically. Medieval theologians did not normally teach that a saint was a rival deity.

Yet popular practice could exceed careful theological distinctions. Stories assigned particular saints specialized powers over diseases, occupations, childbirth, travel, animals, storms, and local crises. Reliquaries attracted pilgrimage and offerings. Competition among shrines could encourage dubious relic claims or miraculous narratives. Reformers repeatedly attacked superstition not because all devotion to exemplary Christians was identical, but because practical religion could transfer fear, trust, and petition from God to a complex heavenly patronage system.

9.2 Relics and pilgrimage

Relic devotion rested partly on biblical and early Christian precedents. The Old Testament recounts a dead man revived through contact with Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:20–21), and Acts describes extraordinary healings connected with objects associated with Paul (Acts 19:11–12). Early Christians also honored martyrs' remains. Medieval practice greatly expanded these precedents into networks of authentication, translation of relics, shrine economies, feast days, and pilgrimage routes.

Pilgrimage could express repentance, gratitude, prayer, or a desire to encounter places associated with Christ and the saints. It also created social movement across regions and sometimes served as imposed penance. Critics within medieval Christianity warned against outward journey without inward conversion. The practice therefore contained both a biblical impulse toward embodied remembrance and a recurring danger that sacred geography or objects could be treated as mechanically powerful (Bull, 2014).

9.3 Marian devotion and the growth of new titles and practices

Mary's place in medieval devotion expanded dramatically. The ancient Christological title *Theotokos*, Mother of God, had been defended at Ephesus to confess the unity of Christ's person, but medieval Western devotion went far beyond that conciliar function. Marian feasts multiplied. Churches, guilds, prayers, hymns, and visual art emphasized her compassion, purity, queenship, and intercession. The *Ave Maria* developed liturgically from biblical greetings and later additions. The rosary took recognizable late medieval forms through gradual development rather than one securely documented act of invention by a single founder (Rubin, 2009).

This growth did not mean that every later Marian dogma was already defined. The Immaculate Conception was vigorously disputed among medieval theologians. Thomas Aquinas and many Dominican theologians resisted formulations that seemed to remove Mary's need for Christ's redemption, while Franciscan theologians, especially John Duns Scotus, developed arguments that preservation from original sin could itself be the supreme application of Christ's saving merit. The doctrine was not dogmatically defined by Rome until 1854. Likewise, belief in Mary's bodily assumption was ancient and widespread but did not receive a modern papal dogmatic definition until 1950. Historical precision therefore forbids reading nineteenth- and twentieth-century definitions backward as if they were uncontested medieval dogmas.

Current Roman Catholic teaching continues to describe Marian devotion as essentially different from adoration and presents Mary's intercession as deriving wholly from Christ (Catholic Church, 1997, paras. 969–971). A fair *Sola Scriptura* assessment must therefore test the strongest claim: not whether Catholics formally worship Mary as a goddess, which official teaching denies, but whether invocation of Mary, titles such as *mediatrix*, and a devotional practice of seeking her heavenly intercession are taught or modeled by the apostles.

9.4 Late medieval piety was not spiritually empty

The presence of abuses should not obscure the vitality of late medieval devotion. Parish communities funded lights, altars, charity, schools, guilds, and prayers. Laypeople participated in confraternities, read books of hours, attended sermons, supported religious houses, and cultivated devotion to Christ's passion. The fifteenth-century English evidence examined by Eamon Duffy, for example, undermines an older historiography in which traditional religion was already universally exhausted before the Reformation. Many communities invested deeply in inherited forms of worship immediately before reformers began dismantling them (Duffy, 2005).

This point is methodologically important. The Protestant Reformation cannot be explained merely as the inevitable collapse of a religion no one believed. Institutional corruption and theological controversy were real, but so were attachment, charity, prayer, and sacramental devotion. Religious systems can be socially vibrant and still contain doctrines that require biblical correction. Popular energy is evidence of commitment, not by itself of apostolic fidelity.

10. Monasticism, Mendicants, and Movements of Renewal

10.1 Benedictine continuity, Cluniac reform, and the Cistercian reaction

Monasticism remained one of medieval Christianity's most durable institutions. Benedictine life structured prayer, work, property, obedience, and liturgy across Europe. The Cluniac reform movement, whose roots preceded this chapter's chronological boundary, created an influential network of monasteries emphasizing liturgical prayer and freedom from local lay control. By the twelfth century, critics could regard Cluniac wealth and ceremonial elaboration as contrary to monastic simplicity, helping inspire Cistercian reform.

The Cistercians sought stricter observance of the Rule of Benedict, simpler architecture, greater manual labor, and a more austere corporate life. Bernard of Clairvaux became one of the most powerful spiritual and ecclesiastical figures of the twelfth century, combining mystical devotion, monastic reform, preaching, political intervention, and support for crusading. Monastic reform therefore did not simply stand outside institutional power. Its leaders could become central actors in the very church structures they sought to renew (Lawrence, 2015).

The recurring pattern is genealogically significant. Medieval Christianity repeatedly generated internal reforms when wealth, property, or institutional routine appeared to compromise founding ideals. The existence of corruption did not produce only separation. It also produced renewal from within.

10.2 Francis of Assisi and evangelical poverty

Francis of Assisi, born around 1181/1182, pursued a form of life centered on following Christ in poverty, preaching repentance, serving the marginalized, and refusing possession. The movement that gathered around him received papal recognition and developed into the Order of Friars Minor, with the final Rule approved by Honorius III in 1223. The Franciscan movement illustrates the institutional possibility that the Waldensian story had exposed from another direction: a radical poverty-preaching movement could remain within the Roman Church if its charism was brought under recognized ecclesiastical order (Robson, 2006).

That integration did not remove tension. Franciscans debated the meaning of absolute poverty, ownership, and obedience. The Spiritual Franciscans pressed poverty claims that later popes judged dangerously rigid. The history therefore complicates any simple distinction between 'institutional church' and 'biblical reformers.' Franciscan life preserved genuine evangelical impulses within papal obedience, while internal disputes showed that even approved reform could generate conflict when a founding ideal confronted institutional sustainability.

10.3 Dominic and the preaching response to heresy

Dominic of Caleruega and the Order of Preachers developed in a setting where church leaders recognized that poorly instructed clergy and visibly wealthy religious representatives were ineffective against dissident preachers. Dominicans emphasized study, disciplined common life, and preaching. Papal approval in 1216 gave the order a mission closely integrated with the church's anti-heretical and pastoral program. Dominican schools became major centers of scholastic theology, producing figures such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

The order's association with later inquisitorial work should neither be concealed nor allowed to erase its broader vocation. Dominicans preached, taught, served as confessors, wrote theology, and staffed universities. Some also became papal

inquisitors. Medieval renewal and coercion could therefore inhabit the same institutional networks. That conjunction is one of the period's most difficult moral realities.

10.4 Women, lay spirituality, and forms outside traditional cloisters

Medieval religious renewal was not limited to male monasteries. Women participated in established orders, new mendicant communities, lay penitential movements, beguine houses, charitable institutions, and mystical networks. Figures such as Hildegard of Bingen, Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Catherine of Siena, and Julian of Norwich represent very different settings, but together they demonstrate that medieval spiritual authority could sometimes emerge outside formal university theology or ordained ministry.

Beguines are especially important because many lived in semi-organized communities without taking permanent monastic vows. They supported themselves through work, prayer, education, nursing, and charity. Ecclesiastical attitudes varied by place and period. Some communities flourished under protection; others came under suspicion when women's religious speech or independence appeared difficult to control. The history warns against treating medieval spirituality as a purely clerical enterprise.

10.5 The *Devotio Moderna* and reform of the inner life

In the late fourteenth century, Geert Groote helped catalyze the *Devotio Moderna*, or 'modern devotion,' in the Low Countries. The Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life emphasized disciplined prayer, Scripture, moral reform, education, humility, and practical imitation of Christ without requiring all members to take monastic vows. A related monastic branch formed in the Windesheim Congregation. Thomas à Kempis, associated with this wider movement, produced *The Imitation of Christ*, one of the most widely circulated devotional works of Western Christianity.

The *Devotio Moderna* matters because it demonstrates that late medieval reform was not exhausted by anti-papal dissent. A Christ-centered, Bible-conscious, morally serious spirituality could flourish within Catholic structures and influence the educational environment from which humanists and later reformers emerged. Its emphasis on inward transformation also exposed the inadequacy of merely external religion. Yet it generally did not challenge the sacramental and hierarchical system at the level later Protestants would.

11. Scholasticism, Universities, and the Intellectual Construction of Medieval Theology

11.1 The rise of universities and the scholastic method

The high medieval period created institutions in which theology could be pursued with a technical rigor impossible to separate from the rise of universities. Bologna became famous for law, Paris for theology and arts, and Oxford for a developing academic culture. Universities were corporate communities with privileges, curricula, degrees, disputations, and transregional student networks. Their theology emerged from lecturing on Scripture and authoritative texts, especially Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, and from structured debate through *quaestiones* and disputations.

Scholasticism is best understood as a family of methods rather than one doctrine. Scholastic theologians posed questions, distinguished meanings, presented objections, analyzed authorities, and attempted rational synthesis. The method could become technical, but it was not intrinsically opposed to Scripture. University theology included biblical lectures, and many major scholastics regarded reason as a servant of revealed truth. The later humanist complaint that scholasticism had become verbally intricate and spiritually remote was sometimes justified, but it should not be projected onto every medieval master.

11.2 Anselm and the logic of atonement

Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo*, written near the end of the eleventh century, asked why God became man and argued that human sin dishonored the order owed to God in a way humanity could not repair by its own resources. Only the God-man could render the satisfaction humanity owed. Later traditions often describe this as the 'satisfaction theory' of atonement. Anselm did not merely reproduce later Protestant penal substitution, but he powerfully emphasized the seriousness of sin, the necessity of the incarnation, and the sufficiency of Christ's work.

A *Sola Scriptura* reading can acknowledge the biblical strength of his instinct while testing his feudal and juridical categories. Scripture unquestionably presents Christ's death as substitutionary, sacrificial, reconciling, victorious, and redemptive. No single medieval model exhausts that witness. Anselm's contribution shows that doctrinal development can sometimes clarify neglected biblical dimensions without carrying equal authority to Scripture itself.

11.3 Aristotle, translation, and the thirteenth-century synthesis

The recovery and translation of major Aristotelian works, often transmitted through Arabic and Jewish intellectual intermediaries as well as Greek sources, transformed Western education. The new corpus raised questions about creation, causality, the soul, knowledge, ethics, and metaphysics. Church authorities sometimes restricted Aristotelian teaching, but theologians eventually developed sophisticated forms of appropriation rather than simply rejecting philosophy.

Thomas Aquinas represents the most famous synthesis. He distinguished truths accessible to natural reason from mysteries known through revelation, while insisting that truth cannot finally contradict truth. His *Summa theologiae* treated God, creation, human action, grace, Christ, sacraments, and last things within an architectonic system. Aquinas defended the Trinity, incarnation, divine creation, moral realism, and the necessity of grace against positions he judged incompatible with Christian revelation. His later centrality to Roman Catholic theology should not obscure the fact that thirteenth-century scholasticism was plural. Bonaventure gave greater Augustinian and illuminationist emphasis, while later thinkers such as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham developed distinct accounts of will, knowledge, universals, and divine freedom.

11.4 Grace, merit, and why ‘medieval salvation by works’ is too crude

The medieval theology of salvation cannot accurately be summarized as a simple doctrine of self-salvation by works. Augustine’s legacy ensured that grace remained fundamental in Western theology. Aquinas taught that even meritorious acts presuppose divine grace and that eternal life exceeds unaided human nature. The technical categories of *meritum de condigno* and, in some traditions, *meritum de congruo* attempted to explain how grace-enabled human acts could be related to divine reward without making God a debtor to autonomous human achievement.

Nevertheless, the mature sacramental and penitential system created a complex grammar of infused grace, virtue, mortal and venial sin, satisfaction, merit, purgatory, and ecclesiastically administered remedies. Ordinary Christians could experience salvation through a network of sacramental obligations, penances, masses, intercessions, and indulgences whose theological sophistication was not always easily communicated. Late medieval schools also disagreed about how divine covenant, human preparation, and grace should be related. The later Protestant rejection of merit therefore addressed a real theological structure, even when Protestant polemics sometimes caricatured medieval theologians as straightforward Pelagians (McGrath, 2004; Oberman, 1963).

The distinction is essential for fair historical evaluation. The later Protestant controversy addressed a real theological structure while disputing how grace, justification, infused righteousness, sacramental mediation, merit, assurance, and final salvation should be related. Medieval schools were not monolithic, and it would be anachronistic to read a mature Lutheran or Reformed doctrine of justification back into their debates. The biblical evaluation of these competing claims is therefore reserved for the theological assessment below.

11.5 Scholastic achievement and scholastic danger

Scholasticism produced enduring intellectual achievements. It clarified distinctions, preserved ancient learning, disciplined argument, and forced theologians to state implications that devotional language could leave vague. It trained generations in logic and textual analysis. It also carried a recurring danger: a conceptual system can become so elaborate that biblical categories are forced to serve the system rather than govern it. Later medieval debates over merit, sacramental causality, Eucharistic metaphysics, papal power, and indulgence demonstrate how technical coherence can coexist with contested scriptural warrant.

Sola Scriptura is not a rejection of disciplined theology. It is a rule governing theology’s authority. Reason, philosophy, creeds, and systems are valuable ministers when they explain the biblical witness. They become problematic when their conclusions acquire binding authority without adequate scriptural foundation.

11.6 Scripture in medieval worship, study, and vernacular culture

Any genealogy of reform that portrays medieval Latin Christianity as biblically empty would misstate the evidence. The Vulgate remained the normative Latin Bible of the Western church, Scripture saturated the Mass and the Divine Office, biblical passages supplied the basic material of preaching, and monastic and university cultures generated commentaries, glosses, concordances, and increasingly portable biblical manuscripts. The *Glossa ordinaria*, in which the biblical text was surrounded by inherited interpretive commentary, became one of the characteristic scholarly forms of the high medieval Bible. Medieval engagement with Scripture was therefore extensive, even when its textual, liturgical, and interpretive setting differed sharply from later Protestant practice (van Liere, 2014).

Most lay Christians encountered Scripture principally by hearing it in worship and preaching, by seeing biblical narratives represented in art and drama, and through vernacular paraphrase, devotional literature, or translated portions rather than by owning a complete Bible. Literacy varied widely, manuscript Bibles were costly, and Latin remained the language of the clergy and universities. Yet vernacular biblical culture existed in several European languages before Wycliffe. Ecclesiastical regulation was likewise uneven: restrictions became especially stringent where translation and lay interpretation were associated with movements judged heretical. The historical evidence therefore supports neither the claim that the medieval Church simply eliminated the Bible from ordinary Christian life nor the opposite claim that lay access was unrestricted and institutionally uncontested (van Liere, 2014).

This distinction clarifies the later authority dispute. The central Reformation question was not whether medieval Christians possessed Scripture. They plainly did. The deeper question concerned the relationship between Scripture and the interpretive authorities that surrounded it: patristic tradition, canon law, university theology, episcopal judgment, councils, and papal decisions. Wycliffe, humanists, and later reformers increasingly pressed the claim that those authorities themselves remained corrigible by the biblical text. The genealogy of *Sola Scriptura* therefore grows out of a church already immersed in Scripture but contested over who possessed final authority to define its binding meaning.

11.7 Late scholastic diversity, the *via moderna*, and the immediate intellectual background to Luther

Late medieval scholasticism was not one undifferentiated Thomist system. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century universities contained several overlapping trajectories often described, with necessary caution, as the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*. The former included major Thomist and Scotist traditions; the latter drew in different ways on figures such as William of Ockham, John Buridan, Gregory of Rimini, and Pierre d'Ailly. These labels identify academic families and methods rather than denominations, and boundaries between them were porous. Their disputes concerned universals, language, divine freedom, the relation of God's absolute and ordained power, grace, merit, moral action, and the conditions under which God accepts the sinner (Kärkkäinen, 2017; McGrath, 2004).

Gabriel Biel became especially important in the German reception of the *via moderna*. His commentary on Peter Lombard synthesized earlier scholastic arguments and became influential in the university culture inherited by the generation immediately preceding the Reformation. Luther's philosophical education at Erfurt was shaped substantially by this environment, even though his later theology criticized central features of the school's account of grace and its use of Aristotle. The relationship was therefore one of inheritance and reaction rather than simple rejection from the outside (Kärkkäinen, 2017; Oberman, 1963).

This late scholastic plurality is genealogically important. It prevents the historian from speaking too loosely of "the medieval doctrine of salvation" and then contrasting it with a single Protestant alternative. The sixteenth-century conflict reorganized debates that were already active within Western Christianity. Questions of divine initiative, human preparation, merit, sacramental grace, assurance, and justification would become sharper after 1517, but the intellectual vocabulary in which they were first argued had been formed inside the medieval university and penitential worlds.

12. Heresy, Dissent, and the Development of Inquisitorial Structures

12.1 The problem of defining medieval heresy

The medieval category *heresy* included teachings judged to contradict the faith and persistent refusal of ecclesiastical correction. It could refer to genuinely radical alternatives to catholic doctrine, including dualist movements that rejected aspects of creation, sacraments, or clerical order, but it could also encompass reform movements whose initial disputes concerned preaching authority or discipline. Because much evidence comes from inquisitors, polemicists, and hostile chroniclers, modern historians debate how far some movements were coherent transregional organizations and how much ecclesiastical classification helped create the appearance of a unified 'heresy' (Arnold, 2001; Moore, 2007).

This debate requires precision rather than skepticism toward all evidence. Medieval Europe did contain dissident religious networks. The problem is that names such as 'Cathar' can flatten local diversity, and interrogations may force complex beliefs into categories supplied by the questioner. Genealogy must therefore reconstruct movements from the best available evidence without simply repeating prosecutorial labels as neutral description.

12.2 From episcopal discipline to papal inquisition

Churches had always exercised discipline, and bishops had long investigated doctrinal error. What changed in the thirteenth century was the development of specialized procedures and delegated papal agents for pursuing persistent heresy. Gregory

IX's legislation in the 1230s helped establish inquisitors, often drawn from Dominicans or Franciscans, who operated with papal authority alongside episcopal structures. The medieval inquisition was not one centralized secret police force with identical procedures everywhere. It was a family of ecclesiastical tribunals and commissions whose forms varied across time and region (Given, 1997).

Inquisitorial procedure relied heavily on testimony, confession, denunciation, records, and networks of reputation. Penalties could include penance, wearing crosses, pilgrimage, imprisonment, confiscation, or, for obstinate convicted heretics, transfer to secular authorities whose laws could impose death. Pope Innocent IV's bull *Ad extirpanda* in 1252 permitted secular authorities to use torture under specified constraints in the investigation of heresy. Even if medieval jurists attempted to regulate such coercion, the theological problem remains stark: violence and fear became instruments for enforcing doctrinal conformity. (Given, 1997; Moore, 2007).

The Fourth Lateran Council's anti-heresy canon demonstrates how ecclesiastical and secular power had become intertwined. Condemned lay heretics were to be handed to secular rulers for punishment, while temporal authorities were expected to purge heresy from their territories. This was not simply private medieval brutality contrary to official policy. Coercion was embedded in legal structures of Christendom (Tanner, 1990).

12.3 The Spanish Inquisition was related but distinct

The Spanish Inquisition authorized in 1478 should be distinguished from the earlier papal inquisition. It developed under the Spanish monarchy with papal authorization and focused initially on baptized Christians of Jewish background suspected of secretly practicing Judaism. Its institutional relationship to the crown, later extension to other targets, and political setting differed from thirteenth-century anti-Cathar inquisitions. Conflating every medieval and early modern inquisition into one timeless institution obscures rather than clarifies the history.

This distinction does not remove moral responsibility. It demonstrates that coercive religious institutions evolved and were adapted by different authorities. The theological question concerns the underlying premise shared across many forms: whether civil punishment and coercive interrogation are legitimate instruments for guarding the Church's faith.

12.4 Coercive Christendom and Jewish communities

The expansion of coercive Christian government also affected Jews, who occupied a legally tolerated but increasingly vulnerable place within medieval Latin societies. Popes at times defended Jews against forced baptism or indiscriminate violence, and Jewish communities could receive legal protection from rulers. Yet crusading outbreaks, polemical preaching, discriminatory legislation, ritual-murder accusations, forced disputations, expulsions, and economic restrictions repeatedly endangered Jewish life. The Rhineland massacres during the First Crusade demonstrated how religious mobilization could turn violently against neighbors who were not the stated target of the expedition.

The Fourth Lateran Council required Jews and Muslims in Christian territories to be distinguished by dress in contexts where authorities feared social or sexual mixing. England expelled Jews in 1290. French expulsions and readmissions occurred repeatedly. In Iberia, anti-Jewish violence, mass conversion under pressure, and suspicion toward *conversos* formed part of the background to the Spanish Inquisition and the 1492 expulsion of unconverted Jews from the Spanish kingdoms. These developments cannot be explained by theology alone; fiscal policy, debt, urban competition, monarchy, war, and popular rumor also mattered (Cohen, 1999; Nirenberg, 1996).

A biblical genealogy must distinguish Christian disagreement with Judaism from coercion or contempt toward Jews. The New Testament rejects unbelief in Jesus as Messiah while simultaneously condemning Gentile boasting and reminding Gentile believers that they do not support the root but are supported by it ([Romans 11:17–24](#)). Paul can grieve Israel's unbelief while affirming God's continuing purposes and calling Christians to humility ([Romans 9:1–5](#); [Romans 11:25–32](#)). Persecution of Jews therefore cannot be justified as an apostolic consequence of Christian confession.

13. The Waldensians: Apostolic Poverty, Vernacular Preaching, and Enduring Dissent

13.1 Valdes and the Poor of Lyons

The movement later called Waldensian began around the 1170s in Lyon around a merchant known as Valdes, Waldo, or Vaudès. The earliest movement did not begin by announcing a new systematic theology or by deliberately founding a separate church. Valdes embraced voluntary poverty, sponsored vernacular access to biblical and patristic materials, and gathered men

and women committed to itinerant preaching and evangelical simplicity. Their central conflict with ecclesiastical authorities concerned unauthorized lay preaching and obedience to the hierarchy rather than an initial rejection of the basic catholic creed (Audisio, 1999; Shahar, 2001).

At the Third Lateran Council in 1179, Valdes and companions sought approval. Sources indicate that their poverty impressed church authorities, but preaching remained conditioned on permission from local clergy. The Poor of Lyons continued to preach. The Council of Verona in 1184, through the anti-heresy decree *Ad abolendam*, condemned them among other dissident groups. Later developments pushed Waldensian communities into more durable separation and clandestine networks.

This history matters because later Protestant accounts sometimes treat the Waldensians as an unbroken apostolic Protestant church existing outside Rome from antiquity. Modern research does not support that genealogy. Medieval Waldensians themselves later developed legends of apostolic antiquity, but the documented movement emerges in the twelfth century. Their historical significance is substantial enough without creating an artificial lineage (Audisio, 1999).

13.2 What the Waldensians genuinely recovered

The Poor of Lyons identified several real weaknesses in medieval church life. They insisted that Christ's commands concerning discipleship, poverty, and proclamation were not possessions of a clerical elite. They promoted vernacular access to Scripture and preaching intelligible to ordinary people. Their missionaries sustained disciplined networks across regions despite persecution. In a church whose clerical wealth could visibly contradict apostolic simplicity, their appeal to the poverty of Christ and the apostles possessed genuine reforming force.

Their history also exposes an institutional question. Franciscan poverty and preaching were eventually integrated through papal approval, while Waldensian preaching outside authorized structures became a mark of disobedience and heresy. The difference cannot be reduced to doctrine alone. The control of preaching authority was central. From a New Testament standpoint, churches are right to test teachers and maintain order, but no hierarchy is entitled to silence faithful proclamation merely because it threatens institutional monopoly ([Acts 8:4](#); [Acts 18:24–28](#); [1 Peter 4:10–11](#)).

13.3 Later development and the danger of retroactive Protestantism

Waldensian communities changed over the centuries. Under persecution they developed clandestine preachers, regional networks, and distinctive practices. Their later theology cannot simply be read backward into Valdes's first circle. In the sixteenth century surviving Waldensians entered formal relationship with the Reformed tradition, especially after the synod at Chanforan in 1532, and their modern descendants therefore have a real Protestant history. That later convergence, however, is not evidence that the twelfth-century movement already possessed the complete doctrinal profile of Calvinism.

Genealogically, the Waldensians are best classified as a medieval evangelical poverty and preaching movement that became an enduring dissenting communion and later joined the Reformed world. They are a genuine pre-Reformation reform current, but not a secret chain proving that Protestant denominationalism existed unchanged throughout the Middle Ages.

14. Avignon, the Western Schism, and the Crisis of Papal Government

14.1 The Avignon papacy, 1309–1377

The papacy's move to Avignon is often described polemically as the 'Babylonian Captivity.' That phrase captures contemporary criticism but can distort the institutional reality. The seven popes who resided principally at Avignon from 1309 until Gregory XI returned to Rome in 1377 did not abandon papal government. On the contrary, the Avignon period saw significant administrative centralization, legal professionalism, fiscal development, and the expansion of papal provisions. The curia became a sophisticated trans-European institution capable of processing benefices, appeals, dispensations, taxation, and diplomacy on a remarkable scale (Rollo-Koster, 2015).

That administrative effectiveness generated resentment. English, German, Italian, and other critics complained about annates, reservations, provisions, and the flow of ecclesiastical revenue toward the curia. French political influence over the Avignon court also damaged perceptions of papal universality, even though the simple claim that the popes were puppets of the French monarchy is too crude. The broader problem was credibility: a papacy claiming universal spiritual jurisdiction could appear entangled with one political sphere and increasingly dependent on complex financial mechanisms.

Avignon also witnessed intense spiritual and reform activity. Catherine of Siena urged Gregory XI to return to Rome. Papal theologians and canonists continued to address ecclesiology, poverty, missions, and crusade. The period therefore cannot be

classified simply as moral collapse. It became dangerous because administrative strength, fiscal grievance, political suspicion, and reform rhetoric converged around the office that claimed to guarantee Western unity.

14.2 The Black Death and the religious culture of catastrophe

The Black Death arrived in Europe in 1347–1348 and caused catastrophic mortality over the following years. Exact percentages varied by region and remain debated, but the demographic shock was immense. Clergy died alongside laity, parishes lost experienced ministers, inheritance patterns changed, labor relations were disrupted, and communities confronted death on a scale beyond normal pastoral routines. The plague did not mechanically cause the Reformation, nor did it produce one uniform religious response. It intensified existing structures of prayer, intercession, charity, fear, procession, burial, and penitence.

Some responses demonstrated courage and pastoral service. Clergy and religious cared for the dying at great personal risk. Other responses exposed social sin. Flagellant movements could become uncontrolled or doctrinally suspect. Jewish communities were falsely accused of poisoning wells and suffered massacres. The church sometimes condemned such violence, but authorities were unable or unwilling to prevent it consistently. The plague therefore deepened both piety and trauma, while making death, judgment, purgatory, intercession, and the fragility of institutions more immediate features of late medieval consciousness.

14.3 The disputed election of 1378

Gregory XI's death in Rome in March 1378 created the crisis later called the Western Schism. Under intense pressure for an Italian pope, the cardinals elected Bartolomeo Prignano, who became Urban VI. His confrontational reform style alienated a group of cardinals who soon declared the election invalid on the ground that coercive pressure had compromised the conclave. They elected Robert of Geneva as Clement VII, who eventually established his court at Avignon. Western Christendom now faced rival popes, each claiming legitimate election and each able to excommunicate the other's supporters.

The fracture did not map neatly onto holiness versus corruption. Respected rulers, bishops, theologians, universities, and saints could support opposite obediences. Kingdoms chose sides partly through geopolitical alliances. Successive Roman and Avignon popes appointed rival bishops and cardinals. The same ecclesiology that treated communion with the true pope as a visible mark of catholic unity now confronted a practical question it had not solved: how could ordinary Christians identify the true pope when competent authorities disagreed about the validity of the election?

The schism therefore exposed a structural weakness in an ecclesiology that concentrated universal unity in a single office without possessing an uncontested mechanism above competing claimants to determine who validly held it. Canonists and theologians searched the tradition for emergency principles, helping revive conciliar theories according to which the universal church or a general council could act when papal government failed (Canning, 2011; Oakley, 2003).

14.4 Pisa, Constance, and conciliarism

The Council of Pisa in 1409 attempted to resolve the schism by declaring both Gregory XII of the Roman line and Benedict XIII of the Avignon line deposed and electing Alexander V. Because neither existing claimant accepted Pisa's authority, the result was not reunion but three obediences. Alexander V was succeeded by John XXIII, whose title is now associated with an antipope rather than the twentieth-century pope who later took the same regnal name.

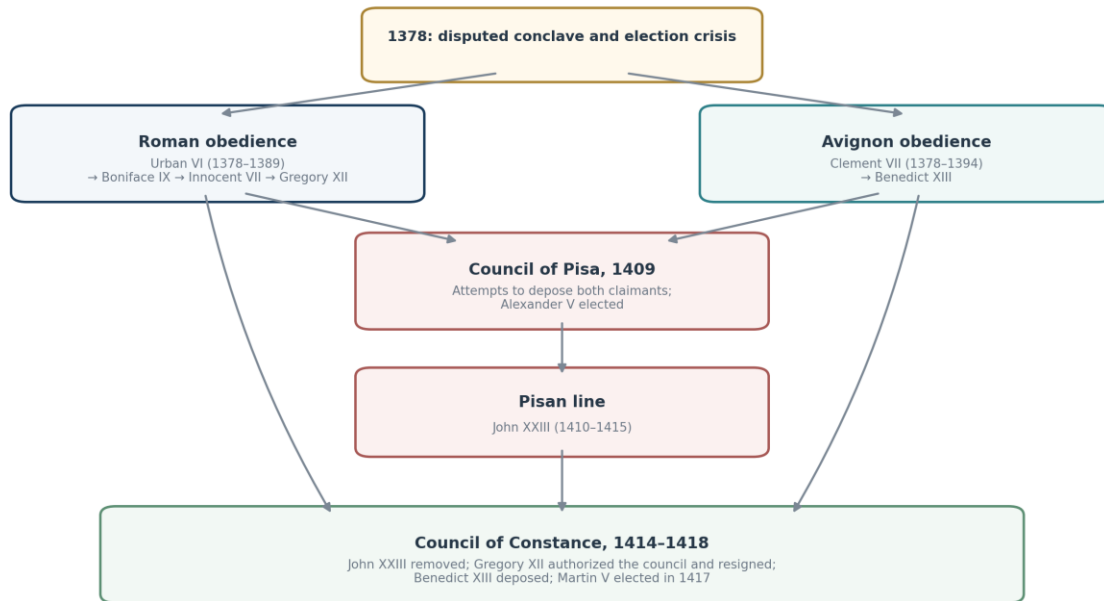
The Council of Constance, meeting from 1414 to 1418, succeeded where Pisa had failed. John XXIII fled and was deposed; Gregory XII authorized the council through his representatives and resigned; Benedict XIII refused settlement and was eventually deposed by the council. Martin V was elected in 1417, restoring a broadly recognized papacy. The process was legally and ecclesiologically complex, but its institutional result was unmistakable: a council had become the effective instrument through which a crisis of competing popes was ended (Beattie, 2025; Rollo-Koster, 2022).

Constance also issued *Haec Sancta* in 1415, declaring that the council, representing the catholic Church, held authority from Christ and that everyone, including the pope, was bound to obey it in matters of faith, schism, and reform. *Frequens* in 1417 prescribed regular future councils. Later Catholic interpretation disputed the precise dogmatic status and scope of *Haec Sancta*, especially because the council's sessions occurred amid contested papal legitimacy. Historically, however, conciliarism became a major late medieval theory of reform. It did not deny the papacy. It attempted to place papal office within the accountability of the universal Church expressed in council (Council of Constance, 1415; Oakley, 2003; Tierney, 1998).

The later Council of Basel opened in 1431 and intensified the conflict between papal and conciliar authority. The movement eventually fractured, while Pope Eugenius IV transferred the council's reunion negotiations with eastern delegates to Ferrara and then Florence. Papal government recovered much of its institutional dominance. Yet the conciliar crisis left a permanent question: if a pope can err, govern badly, or become one among rival claimants, what visible authority can correct him?

THE WESTERN SCHISM, 1378-1417

Rival papal obediences and the conciliar settlement



Genealogical significance: the crisis damaged confidence in a single visible papal government and strengthened conciliar theories of reform.

Figure 2. The Western Schism, 1378–1417.

Note. The diagram simplifies a legally complex crisis. The central historical point is that competing papal lines persisted until conciliar action, resignations, depositions, and the election of Martin V restored broad recognition of one pope.

14.5 Florence in 1439: reunion, papal claims, and sacramental definition

The Council of Ferrara-Florence attempted reunion with the Byzantine East under the shadow of Ottoman expansion. Greek and Latin theologians negotiated the Filioque, purgatory, Eucharistic bread, and papal primacy. The decree *Laetentur caeli* in 1439 proclaimed reunion, but the settlement encountered strong opposition in the East and did not produce enduring ecclesial union. Its failure shows that formal agreement by delegates can be insufficient when broader ecclesial reception is lacking.

Florence is also significant inside the Western genealogy because its decree for the Armenians, *Exultate Deo*, explicitly enumerated the seven sacraments and described their matter, form, minister, and effects within a mature scholastic framework. The text illustrates the degree to which Western sacramental theology had become systematized by the fifteenth century. The contrast with the New Testament is not that baptism, Eucharist, marriage, ordination, confession, and anointing are absent from Scripture. It is that the later sevenfold taxonomy, sacramental causality, and ministerial framework represent a developed theological system rather than a first-century apostolic list.

15. John Wycliffe and the Lollard Challenge

15.1 Oxford, ecclesiastical wealth, and the problem of authority

John Wycliffe, an Oxford theologian who died in 1384, became the most consequential English critic of late medieval ecclesiastical structures before the Reformation. His thought developed across university controversy, royal politics, disputes over church property, biblical interpretation, and Eucharistic theology. Wycliffe's doctrine of *dominium*, lordship, connected legitimate possession and authority with righteousness in ways that could be used to challenge corrupt clergy and ecclesiastical wealth. His exact political implications shifted across his career, but the underlying criticism was clear: possession of office could not make spiritual corruption holy (Hudson, 1988).

Wycliffe increasingly elevated Scripture over ecclesiastical traditions and argued that the Church in its deepest sense was the community of the predestined rather than simply the visible hierarchy under the pope. He attacked papal claims, criticized mendicant wealth and clerical privilege, and called for a church conformed more closely to apostolic poverty and preaching. These positions were not one prepackaged Protestant confession. They emerged through medieval scholastic categories and political disputes. Their later Protestant resonance should not obscure their fourteenth-century intellectual setting.

15.2 Scripture and the vernacular Bible

Wycliffe's name became permanently associated with English vernacular Scripture. Two major forms of an English Bible translation circulated among Wycliffite networks in the late fourteenth century. It is inaccurate to say that Wycliffe personally translated the entire Bible single-handedly. The work was collective and probably involved several associates. It is equally inaccurate to claim that the medieval church universally forbade all vernacular Scripture. Vernacular biblical materials existed in multiple regions, and ecclesiastical attitudes varied with context. English authorities became particularly restrictive when vernacular translation became associated with Wycliffite dissent (Hudson, 1988).

The controversy therefore concerned authority as much as language. Who could translate? Who could teach? Could lay readers interpret Scripture outside clerically supervised channels? Wycliffite emphasis on the accessibility and supremacy of the biblical Word threatened a system in which ordained and university-trained authorities claimed responsibility for guarding interpretation. The later Reformation would multiply this conflict through print.

15.3 Eucharistic doctrine and the rejection of transubstantiation

Wycliffe's attack on transubstantiation moved his conflict from disciplinary reform into the heart of medieval sacramental theology. Drawing on philosophical realism, he denied that the substance of bread ceased to exist after consecration, while still affirming a real relation between Christ and the sacrament. His position was condemned, and it alienated some former political supporters because Eucharistic orthodoxy had become a central marker of catholic belonging.

This episode shows why reform cannot be reduced to moral complaint. Once the authority of the church was challenged by Scripture and reason, defined doctrine itself became open to re-examination. The resulting controversy anticipated a recurrent Reformation pattern: criticism of ecclesiastical abuses expanded into disagreement over how Scripture governs sacramental ontology.

15.4 Lollardy after Wycliffe

The label *Lollard* was applied to diverse followers and sympathizers rather than one centrally organized denomination. Lollard communities criticized clerical wealth, images, pilgrimage, confession, transubstantiation, oaths, or warfare in varying combinations. Some promoted vernacular Scripture and lay teaching. Others preserved more conventional beliefs. Modern scholarship has therefore moved away from treating Lollardy as a perfectly uniform underground Protestant church (Somerset, 2014).

Ecclesiastical and royal repression intensified in the early fifteenth century. The English statute *De heretico comburendo* of 1401 provided for burning convicted obstinate heretics, and the failed rising associated with Sir John Oldcastle in 1414 reinforced elite fears that theological dissent could become political rebellion. Even under pressure, Lollard manuscript culture and household networks survived into the early sixteenth century. Recent scholarship continues to document real continuity between late fourteenth-century Wycliffite dissent and communities encountered on the eve of the English Reformation, while also resisting the simplistic claim that Protestantism merely uncovered an unchanged underground church (Hudson, 1988; Somerset, 2014).

Wycliffe's reforming strengths are therefore clear: he exposed ecclesiastical wealth, insisted that office does not sanctify corruption, promoted Scripture, and challenged doctrines he believed lacked biblical warrant. His limitations are equally important. His theology remained embedded in medieval philosophical debates, his ecclesiology of the predestined could make the visible church difficult to define, and later Lollard positions varied widely. Wycliffe is a genuine ancestor of several Reformation questions, not a sixteenth-century Protestant displaced into the fourteenth century.

16. Jan Hus, Constance, and the Hussite Transformation of Bohemia

16.1 Prague before Hus: university, reform, and Wycliffite influence

Bohemia possessed its own reform environment before Jan Hus became its most famous figure. Prague was a major royal and university center. Czech and German political identities interacted with ecclesiastical grievances. Reform preachers criticized

clerical immorality, simony, and wealth. Wycliffe's writings entered university debate through intellectual networks connecting Oxford and Prague, but Czech reform cannot be reduced to imported English ideas.

Hus, born around 1370, became a university master and preacher at Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, where preaching in Czech gave reform a wide public audience. He emphasized moral reform of clergy, the authority of Christ over the Church, and the need for ministers to live consistently with the gospel they preached. He accepted substantial elements of traditional sacramental Christianity. His conflict therefore developed not because he immediately rejected the whole medieval system, but because institutional, national, moral, and doctrinal disputes escalated together (Fudge, 2013).

16.2 From reform preaching to conflict with papal authority

The Western Schism gave Hus's ecclesiology an immediate context. When popes rivaled one another, the claim that visible obedience to one papal office constituted the essence of church unity was difficult to sustain practically. Hus increasingly emphasized Christ as the head of the Church and appealed to Scripture over papal commands he considered contrary to Christ. He opposed an indulgence campaign connected to a papal crusade against political rivals, helping transform an academic and moral reform movement into direct conflict with papal authority.

Hus drew from Wycliffe but did not simply reproduce him. He rejected some condemned Wycliffite positions and continued to affirm the real presence in ways distinguishable from Wycliffe's Eucharistic critique. Ecclesiastical prosecutors nevertheless treated Wycliffite association as highly significant. The controversy therefore illustrates how networks of ideas, reputations, and institutional suspicion can shape heresy proceedings beyond one isolated proposition.

16.3 The Council of Constance and Hus's execution

Hus traveled to the Council of Constance in 1414 under a safe-conduct associated with Emperor Sigismund, hoping to defend his teaching. He was detained, interrogated, and tried. The legal history has been debated, including the meaning and force of safe-conduct and the irregularities of the proceedings. Thomas Fudge's detailed reconstruction concludes that the process contained significant irregularities but operated within the legal assumptions of medieval heresy procedure more than later martyrological narratives sometimes admit. Hus was condemned for heresy and contumacy and burned on 6 July 1415 (Fudge, 2013).

His death became far more consequential than his judges anticipated. In Bohemia, Hus was remembered as a martyr to reform and national grievance. Constance had solved the papal schism while simultaneously creating a new ecclesiastical and political crisis. This contrast is genealogically important. A council capable of correcting papal fragmentation could itself enforce disputed doctrine through coercive death. Conciliarity was therefore not automatically synonymous with biblical reform.

16.4 The Hussite wars and the Four Articles of Prague

After Hus's death and the death of Jerome of Prague in 1416, Bohemia moved toward revolutionary conflict. The death of King Wenceslaus IV in 1419, urban upheaval, religious polarization, and external crusading campaigns helped produce the Hussite wars. The reform coalition was internally diverse. Moderate Utraquists emphasized communion under both bread and wine for the laity, while more radical Taborites pursued broader liturgical and social changes.

The Four Articles of Prague, formulated in the early 1420s, expressed major Hussite demands: freer preaching of God's Word, communion in both kinds, reform of clerical wealth and secular power, and public discipline of grave sin. These demands reveal a movement whose concerns were simultaneously biblical, sacramental, ecclesiastical, and political. They also show why 'Hussite' cannot be treated as one theology. Coalition unity against external enemies did not eliminate internal doctrinal conflict.

The wars ended not through simple military defeat but through negotiation and internal realignment. The Compactata associated with Basel in 1436 provided a settlement for moderate Utraquism, especially communion under both kinds, while radical Taborite power had been broken at Lipany in 1434. Bohemia thus became a region in which a significant nonconforming church order survived before the sixteenth-century Reformation.

16.5 The *Unitas Fratrum* and later descendants

In 1457 a community later known as the *Unitas Fratrum*, Unity of the Brethren, emerged from the Bohemian reform environment. Influenced by Hussite reform, the spiritual legacy of Petr Chelčický, and a desire for disciplined New Testament Christianity, the Brethren developed their own ministry, communal structures, hymnody, and educational culture. Their later history would intersect with the Protestant Reformation and, after severe persecution and migration, contribute to the eighteenth-century Moravian renewal.

The genealogical relationship must be stated precisely. Modern Moravian Christianity is not a simple unchanged survival of Hus's own church. The line runs through Hussite reform, the formation of the Unity of the Brethren, later confessional encounters, persecution, diaspora, and renewal. Yet unlike many alleged medieval-to-modern genealogies, there is a demonstrable institutional history connecting the fifteenth-century Unity with later Moravian identity.

Hus and the Hussites therefore corrected real abuses and recovered important biblical emphases on preaching, Christ's headship, moral accountability, and reception of the cup. They also remained internally diverse and retained substantial medieval theology. Their history demonstrates again that reform before Luther was real without being identical to the Reformation that followed.

Table 3. Major late medieval reform and renewal currents

Reform current	Origin and primary concern	What it genuinely challenged or recovered	Historical outcome
Waldensians / Poor of Lyons	Lyon, c. 1170s; poverty and lay vernacular preaching	Apostolic simplicity, vernacular proclamation, critique of clerical monopoly	Condemned, dispersed, survived clandestinely; later joined Reformed Protestantism in the sixteenth century.
Wycliffe and Lollardy	Oxford/England, late 14th century; Scripture, church wealth, Eucharist	Scriptural authority, moral accountability, vernacular biblical culture	Condemned and repressed; diverse networks survived into early 16th century.
Hus and Hussites	Prague/Bohemia, early 15th century; reform preaching, ecclesiology, communion	Christ's headship, moral reform, Word-centered preaching, communion in both kinds	Hus executed; Hussite revolution; Utraquist settlement; Unitas Fratrum emerges.
Conciliarism	Western Schism, c. 1378–1430s; crisis of papal legitimacy	Institutional accountability and the principle that universal church cannot be reduced to one disputed claimant	Helps end Schism; later papal resurgence limits conciliar program.
Devotio Moderna	Low Countries, late 14th–15th centuries; inward devotion and education	Christ-centered spirituality, disciplined prayer, Scripture, lay religious formation	Remains largely within Catholicism; influences schools and humanist environment.
Biblical humanism	Italy, Low Countries, German/Swiss cities, 15th–early 16th centuries	Ad fontes, Greek and Hebrew study, textual criticism, moral reform	Creates scholarly tools used by Catholic reformers and Protestants alike.

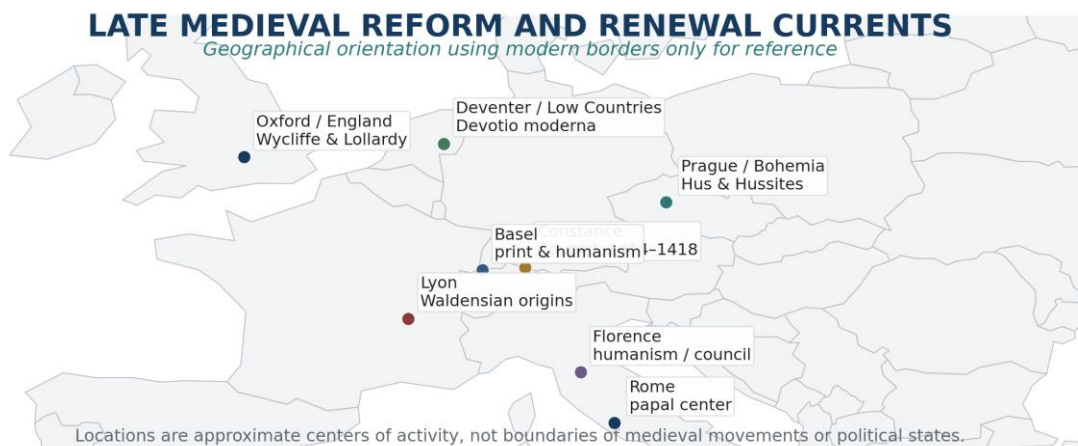


Figure 3. Late medieval reform and renewal currents across Western and Central Europe.

Note. Modern borders are shown only as geographical orientation. The markers identify approximate centers of activity and do not represent medieval political boundaries or the full geographical reach of the movements.

17. Renaissance Humanism, Printing, and the Return to Biblical Languages

17.1 Humanism was not the same thing as Protestantism

Renaissance humanism transformed the intellectual environment of Western Christianity through renewed attention to classical languages, rhetoric, historical context, manuscripts, and textual criticism. Its watchword *ad fontes*, ‘to the sources,’ encouraged scholars to compare later Latin traditions with Greek and Hebrew texts and earlier Christian writers. Humanists

could be devout Catholics, sharp critics of clergy, servants of popes, civic intellectuals, or eventually supporters of Protestant reform. Humanism therefore supplied methods and habits rather than one confessional program (Nauert, 2006).

This distinction matters because the recovery of biblical languages did not automatically produce *Sola Scriptura*. A scholar could correct the Vulgate, criticize a forged papal document, and remain committed to sacramental Catholicism. Yet philology had destabilizing potential. Once authoritative claims were shown to depend on textual history, readers could ask whether ecclesiastical tradition had preserved, altered, or misunderstood its sources.

17.2 Lorenzo Valla and the Donation of Constantine

Lorenzo Valla's fifteenth-century philological critique of the Donation of Constantine became a classic demonstration of humanist method. The Donation had long circulated as a document in which Constantine supposedly granted sweeping privileges to Pope Sylvester and the Roman see. Earlier critics had doubted it, but Valla's linguistic and historical analysis showed that its Latin and institutional assumptions belonged to a later age and could not plausibly come from Constantine's fourth century.

The importance of the episode should be stated carefully. Papal primacy did not depend entirely on the Donation, and medieval canonists possessed many other arguments. Exposing the forgery therefore did not refute every Roman claim. It did remove a false piece of evidence and demonstrate that venerable documentary tradition could be tested historically. For this project's methodology, Valla's achievement is exemplary: institutional usefulness cannot make a forged source authentic.

Valla also applied philology to the Latin New Testament, comparing the Vulgate with Greek readings. Erasmus later published Valla's New Testament annotations in 1505, helping transmit the method of historical-linguistic criticism into northern humanism (den Haan, 2024).

17.3 Printing before Luther

Johannes Gutenberg and his associates developed European movable-type printing in the mid-fifteenth century, with the famous forty-two-line Bible produced in Mainz around 1454–1455. Printing did not instantly create mass literacy, eliminate manuscripts, or make books inexpensive for everyone. Its historical power lay in reproducibility. Once type was set, relatively uniform copies could be produced at a scale and speed fundamentally different from scribal copying. Presses multiplied across major cities during the later fifteenth century, and networks of booksellers and fairs distributed texts across political boundaries (Eisenstein, 2005; Pettegree, 2023).

The church did not initially treat printing as an enemy. Clergy, universities, humanists, and religious orders used presses for liturgy, theology, indulgence certificates, canon law, devotional works, classics, and Scripture. Early dated print products included indulgences. The same medium could therefore strengthen existing institutions and later amplify challenges to them. Technology did not cause the Reformation by itself. It changed the cost, speed, standardization, and public reach of controversy.

By 1517 the press was no longer an experimental invention. It had been developing for roughly seven decades. Printers understood markets, short works could be reproduced rapidly, and transregional scholarly networks moved texts between cities. The crucial question was no longer whether ideas could be copied. It was whether an argument would find publishers, readers, patrons, translators, and political protection (Pettegree, 2005, 2023).

17.4 Erasmus and the *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516

Desiderius Erasmus embodied the possibilities and limits of biblical humanism. He criticized clerical ignorance, empty ceremony, theological quarrels, war, and moral hypocrisy while calling Christians back to the philosophy of Christ. He edited patristic texts, cultivated Greek, corresponded across Europe, and used the printing press with exceptional skill. Yet in 1516 he remained a Catholic humanist seeking reform, not the founder of a Protestant church.

His *Novum Instrumentum omne*, printed by Johann Froben at Basel in 1516, placed a Greek New Testament text alongside Erasmus's new Latin translation and extensive annotations. The Complutensian Polyglot had printed a Greek New Testament earlier, in 1514, but its publication was delayed; Erasmus's became the first Greek New Testament actually published and widely circulated. His edition was prepared rapidly and relied on a limited manuscript base, so it contained errors that later textual criticism would correct. Its historical significance nevertheless was enormous. Western theologians now possessed a printed Greek text that could be compared directly with the Vulgate, and Erasmus's annotations made textual and translational questions part of public theological scholarship (Epp, 2016; Erasmus, 1516; Krans & Yi, 2025).

Erasmus did not intend his work to overthrow church authority. He dedicated the edition to Pope Leo X and understood philology as a resource for Christian renewal. That fact is genealogically decisive. Many instruments later used by Protestants were generated within pre-Reformation Catholic reform. The road to 1517 ran not only through dissenters persecuted by Rome, but also through scholars, schools, presses, bishops, friars, and Catholic humanists working inside the existing church.

18. Europe in 1516: Why Large-Scale Reform Had Become Possible

By 1516 Western Christianity remained institutionally united under the Roman see. No Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Anabaptist, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Methodist church existed. Most western Europeans were baptized into a sacramental world whose rhythms were organized by parish, Mass, calendar, confession, saints, fasts, feasts, and ecclesiastical law. The papacy survived the Western Schism and had reasserted authority over conciliar challenges. Religious orders remained influential. Universities trained theologians and lawyers. Pilgrimage and confraternities were active. Late medieval Catholic religion was not waiting passively to die.

Yet the conditions for a much larger rupture had accumulated. Papal universal claims coexisted with national monarchies and territorial rulers increasingly protective of their own jurisdictions. The curia's fiscal mechanisms generated resentment. Benefice pluralism, absenteeism, nepotism, poorly trained clergy, and moral failures provided visible material for reform preaching, even while many clergy served faithfully. The Renaissance papacy combined remarkable artistic and humanist patronage with Italian dynastic politics, territorial warfare, and family advancement. Critics could therefore ask whether the successors of the apostles had become too deeply embedded in princely culture.

The Fifth Lateran Council, opened in 1512 and still meeting in 1516, shows that institutional leaders recognized the need for reform. It addressed ecclesiastical governance, preaching, education, and the conciliar challenge. Yet many reforms lacked implementation strong enough to answer long-standing grievances. The problem was not an absolute absence of reform proposals. It was the difficulty of converting repeated reform rhetoric into transformation across a vast transnational church.

The theology of salvation was likewise both sophisticated and pastorally vulnerable. Learned theologians distinguished guilt from punishment, grace from merit, contrition from attrition, sacrament from magic, veneration from worship, and indulgence from forgiveness. Ordinary religious life translated those distinctions into preaching, confession, pilgrimage, Masses, relics, suffrages, certificates, and practices whose meaning could be uneven. A pastoral system designed to guide sinners toward repentance could also generate anxiety over whether one had confessed sufficiently, performed satisfaction, or faced remaining purification.

Print had created a new communications environment. Humanists had made original-language study prestigious. Valla had demonstrated that ancient authority claims could be tested by historical philology. Erasmus had placed a Greek New Testament into European scholarly circulation. Vernacular religious reading had expanded. Reform memories persisted among Waldensians, Lollards, Hussites, and the Unity of the Brethren. Conciliarism had shown that papal government could be publicly challenged from within catholic legal tradition.

Politics made all of this combustible. A reformer protected by a territorial ruler could survive in a way Wycliffe, Hus, or local preachers often could not. Universities could become institutional bases for controversy. Printers could carry a Latin disputation into vernacular public debate. A local quarrel could cross borders before ecclesiastical authorities had decided how to contain it. None of these conditions made the Reformation inevitable. Together they made a continent-wide rupture possible.

The year 1516 therefore forms an analytically meaningful endpoint. Erasmus's Greek New Testament symbolized the convergence of humanist scholarship, print, and biblical renewal. The medieval church had developed formidable institutions and a richly elaborated theological system. It had also generated reformers, critics, alternative communities, methods of textual criticism, and theories of accountability. What would happen when a university theologian used those inherited resources to challenge the theology and pastoral practice of indulgences, and when the controversy escaped the normal mechanisms of medieval containment, belongs to the next chapter.

19. Causes and Triggers: Why Medieval Reform Pressure Accumulated

The pressures that produced the Reformation environment cannot be ranked as one simple chain of causes. Doctrinal development, institutional centralization, political conflict, economic grievance, social change, pastoral concern, textual scholarship, and communication technology interacted. A church can survive doctrinal disagreements when institutions possess trusted mechanisms for correction. It can survive institutional abuse when reform is credible. It can survive political

conflict when theology does not make one contested office the indispensable center of unity. By the early sixteenth century, Western Christianity faced strains in all these areas simultaneously.

Doctrinal causes included the elaboration of sacramental efficacy, Eucharistic metaphysics, penitential satisfaction, purgatory, indulgences, the treasury of merits, saintly intercession, Marian devotion, and strong papal claims. Some developments formalized earlier beliefs; others extended theological logic beyond what earlier centuries had defined. They created a dense doctrinal system in which challenging one component could destabilize several others.

Ecclesiastical causes included papal centralization, canon-law bureaucracy, the concentration of sacramental authority in ordained clergy, benefice structures, and unresolved tension between primacy and conciliar accountability. The Western Schism proved that an institution designed to guarantee visible unity could itself become the locus of visible division.

Moral and pastoral causes included simony, concubinage or sexual misconduct among some clergy, absenteeism, pluralism, poor preaching, inadequate education, ostentatious wealth, and failures of pastoral care. Medieval reform councils and orders themselves document that such problems were not Protestant inventions. At the same time, many priests, monks, nuns, friars, bishops, and laypeople pursued serious holiness. The issue was persistent unevenness and the limited capacity of repeated reform programs to produce consistent change.

Political causes included the growth of monarchies and territorial states unwilling to concede unrestricted external jurisdiction, imperial-papal rivalry, city politics, national tensions in universities and councils, and rulers' use of reform for dynastic or fiscal goals. Later Protestant survival would depend heavily on political protection, but political agency already shaped medieval Catholic reform and dissent.

Economic causes included church landholding, tithes, benefices, annates, fees, indulgence finance, crusading taxes, and patronage. These were not merely corrupt intrusions into otherwise spiritual institutions. Large organizations required resources, and churches funded worship, education, charity, administration, diplomacy, and building. The danger arose when financial structures appeared to monetize spiritual goods or when ecclesiastical income served elite consumption more visibly than pastoral mission.

Cultural and intellectual causes included university debate, scholastic pluralism, vernacular literacy, humanist philology, rediscovery of ancient sources, and growing historical criticism. Valla's work on the Donation of Constantine demonstrated that authoritative tradition could contain forgery. Erasmus's 1516 edition demonstrated that the Latin biblical text could be subjected to Greek comparison. These methods did not dictate Protestant conclusions, but they weakened the assumption that received Latin forms were beyond historical scrutiny.

Technological causes centered on print. Manuscript dissent had survived for centuries, but printing altered replication, standardization, market reach, and the tempo of controversy. The Reformation became possible not because print guaranteed truth, but because it changed the relation between local dispute and public audience. Authorities could condemn an individual faster than before, yet they could no longer assume that condemnation would stop the text.

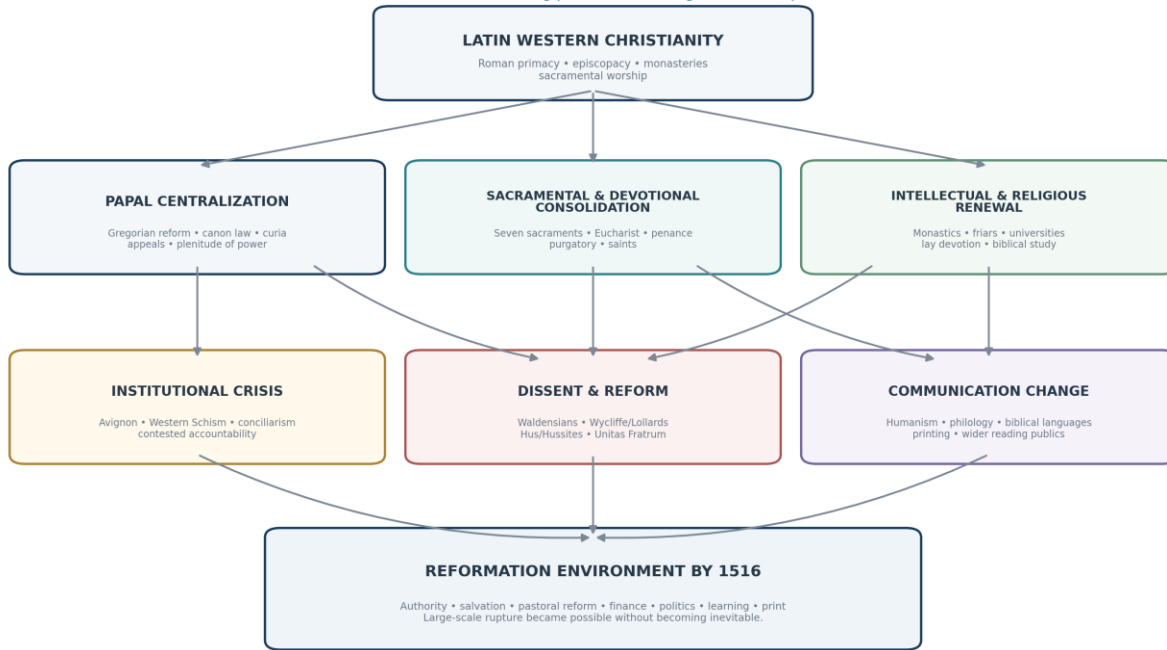
Table 4. Before / Change / Result: transformation of the Latin West by 1516

Before	Medieval change	Result by 1516
Roman primacy within a first-millennium conciliar order	Gregorian reform, decretals, curia, appellate jurisdiction, papal monarchy	Strong universal papal claims alongside memories of schism and conciliar correction.
Baptism, Eucharist, ordination, marriage, anointing, repentance as inherited Christian rites	Scholastic classification and late medieval conciliar definition of seven sacraments	Integrated sacramental system mediating Christian life from birth to death.
Realist Eucharistic language	Transubstantiation, priestly consecration, sacrificial Mass, host devotion	Eucharist becomes a central doctrinal and devotional boundary.
Repentance, confession, discipline, prayer for dead	Annual confession, satisfaction, purgatory, suffrages, indulgences	Sophisticated penitential economy vulnerable to pastoral anxiety and financial abuse.
Honor for martyrs and biblical Mary	Expansive saint, relic, pilgrimage, and Marian devotional cultures	Powerful popular piety, alongside recurring reform criticism of mediation and superstition.
Monastic asceticism and episcopal teaching	Mendicant orders, universities, scholasticism, lay devotional movements	Genuine internal renewal and intellectual sophistication coexist with institutional consolidation.
Local preaching and manuscript culture	Waldensian, Lollard, Hussite, humanist, and conciliar networks	Multiple precedents for criticizing authority, wealth, doctrine, and control of Scripture.

Before	Medieval change	Result by 1516
Scribal reproduction	Movable-type print and commercial book networks	Controversy can become transregional before traditional disciplinary mechanisms contain it.

GENEALOGICAL TRANSFORMATION, AD 1054-1516

One Latin communion, interacting processes, no single inevitable path to 1517



Genealogy: medieval Latin Christianity remained institutionally Roman while generating reform, dissent, and renewal currents that later intersected with sixteenth-century Protestant rupture.

Figure 4. Genealogical transformation, AD 1054–1516.

Note. Medieval Latin Christianity did not produce one direct ‘proto-Protestant’ branch. Papal centralization, sacramental consolidation, internal renewal, institutional crisis, dissent, humanism, and printing converged to create the environment in which sixteenth-century rupture became possible.

20. Institutional Outcomes, Branches, and Later Descendants

The medieval Latin church remained one broad communion centered on Rome throughout this chapter’s period, despite internal schisms and dissent. The Western Schism divided obediences rather than creating enduring denominations, and reunion under Martin V restored a single broadly recognized papal line. Conciliarism did not become a separate church. Mendicant orders, scholastic schools, confraternities, and the Devotio Moderna remained within Latin Catholicism. The principal genealogical outcome is therefore not a denominational tree splitting repeatedly between 1054 and 1516. It is the formation of the mature institutional and theological parent tradition from which the Western Reformation would soon break.

Several secondary genealogies nevertheless matter. The Waldensians formed a persistent dissenting network and later entered the Reformed Protestant orbit. Lollardy created enduring English communities and manuscript networks, although its direct contribution to the English Reformation varied by region and should not be exaggerated. The Hussite revolution produced Utraquist institutions and the Unity of the Brethren, giving Bohemia and Moravia a demonstrable pre-Lutheran reform lineage. The later Moravian Church ultimately traces institutional ancestry through that Unity, though with major episodes of persecution, migration, and eighteenth-century renewal between the two.

Scholasticism produced descendants across confessional boundaries. Thomas Aquinas became especially authoritative in Roman Catholic theology, yet Protestant scholastic traditions later borrowed medieval methods of distinction and disputation. Humanism likewise crossed future confessional lines. Erasmus remained within the Catholic Church, while the philological tools he popularized shaped Protestant translators and exegetes. Printing belonged to no confession at all. Catholic institutions used it before and after reformers did.

The clearest genealogy is therefore environmental rather than a single line of descent. Medieval Catholicism generated the papal, sacramental, penitential, and devotional structures later defended at Trent. It also generated reform movements,

conciliar theories, vernacular biblical cultures, educational institutions, humanist criticism, and communication technologies that reformers would use against parts of that inherited system. The Reformation came both against medieval Christianity and out of it.

21. Biblical-Theological Assessment: Testing the Medieval Synthesis by Scripture

Historical explanation cannot determine biblical truth by itself. A doctrine may be ancient, intellectually sophisticated, pastorally meaningful, or institutionally useful and still exceed Scripture. Conversely, later abuse does not automatically invalidate a practice that Scripture itself teaches. The following assessment therefore asks, issue by issue, what the New Testament affirms and where the medieval system moved beyond the apostolic norm.

21.1 Papal primacy and universal jurisdiction

The strongest biblical case for Roman primacy begins with Peter. Jesus gives Peter a prominent role among the Twelve, calls him rock in [Matthew 16:18–19](#), prays particularly for him in [Luke 22:31–32](#), and commands him to shepherd Christ’s sheep in [John 21:15–17](#). Peter is prominent in Acts, speaks at Pentecost, opens mission to Cornelius, and contributes decisively to the Jerusalem deliberation. Any ecclesiology that erases Peter’s leadership fails to account for the text.

The question is whether these passages establish a hereditary Roman office with universal ordinary jurisdiction over every church. The New Testament never identifies Peter as bishop of Rome in the later monarchical sense, never states that his distinctive commission passes exclusively to Roman successors, and never places other apostles under a Roman administrative court. In [Acts 15](#), Peter speaks with weight, but James formulates the judgment within a gathering of apostles and elders ([Acts 15:6–29](#)). Paul can confront Peter publicly when his conduct compromises gospel implications ([Galatians 2:11–14](#)). Local churches are instructed to appoint qualified elders or overseers, often in plurality, without reference to routine papal jurisdiction ([Acts 14:23](#); [Titus 1:5–9](#); [1 Peter 5:1–4](#)).

A biblical conclusion can therefore affirm Petrine prominence, the usefulness of translocal leadership, and the legitimacy of churches cooperating through councils and recognized centers. It cannot identify the sweeping jurisdictional claims of *Dictatus papae* or *Unam sanctam* as explicit apostolic institutions. Medieval papal monarchy is historically intelligible as development, but antiquity and institutional continuity do not convert development into divine mandate.

21.2 Church reform and the danger of coercive supremacy

The Gregorian campaign against simony and corrupt appointment addressed real biblical concerns. Spiritual office must not be bought ([Acts 8:18–24](#)); leaders must meet moral qualifications ([1 Timothy 3:1–7](#)); shepherds must not exploit the flock ([1 Peter 5:2–3](#)). Resisting the sale of office and political capture of ministry could therefore be genuine reform.

The error appears when reform becomes a rationale for domination. Jesus explicitly contrasts Gentile models of lordship with leadership among his disciples ([Mark 10:42–45](#)). Apostolic authority is real, but it is ministerial, accountable to Christ, and bounded by the gospel. No ecclesiastical office receives a blank warrant to depose rulers, bind consciences beyond Scripture, or identify submission to one human jurisdiction as a universal condition of salvation.

21.3 The seven sacraments and sacramental efficacy

Scripture unmistakably commands baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It also teaches laying on of hands, marriage, appointment of elders, confession, forgiveness, and anointing of the sick. Medieval theologians were therefore not inventing seven practices out of nothing. The biblical question concerns taxonomy and efficacy. The New Testament never presents an inspired list of seven rites called sacraments, nor does it state that these seven share one identical mode of conferring grace through authorized administration.

Baptism is joined closely to discipleship, repentance, union with Christ, cleansing, and incorporation into his people ([Matthew 28:19–20](#); [Romans 6:3–4](#)). The Lord’s Supper is communion in Christ, remembrance, proclamation, self-examination, and covenantal participation ([1 Corinthians 10:16–17](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23–29](#)). Marriage is holy and richly symbolic of Christ and the Church ([Ephesians 5:22–33](#)), but Scripture does not make its validity depend on the later sevenfold sacramental system. Elders pray and anoint the sick ([James 5:14–16](#)), but the passage does not restrict the rite to imminent death.

The appropriate conclusion is not that sacred rites are spiritually empty. It is that later sacramental categories remain subordinate theological constructions. They may clarify biblical practices, but they cannot bind conscience where Scripture has not established their number, metaphysics, or necessary ministerial form.

21.4 Priesthood and the unique priesthood of Christ

The New Testament has ministers, elders, overseers, deacons, teachers, and evangelists, but its controlling theology of priesthood centers on Jesus Christ. He possesses an untransferable priesthood because he lives forever, offered himself once, and now intercedes for his people ([Hebrews 7:23–28](#)). Believers corporately are described as a holy and royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices ([1 Peter 2:5, 9](#)).

Ordained ministry is therefore biblical; a separate sacrificing priesthood whose distinctive power is necessary to re-present propitiatory sacrifice and mediate sacramental forgiveness is much harder to establish from the apostolic texts. Pastors preach, teach, shepherd, baptize, preside, pray, discipline, and guard doctrine. Their authority is serious but derived. It does not displace the believer's direct access to God through the one mediator, Jesus Christ ([1 Timothy 2:5](#); [Hebrews 4:14–16](#)).

21.5 Eucharist and transubstantiation

The medieval church was correct to resist a trivialized Lord's Supper. Paul treats participation in the cup and bread as communion in Christ and warns that unworthy reception can bring severe judgment. A merely casual memorialism cannot account for the gravity of [1 Corinthians 10–11](#). Jesus's words, 'This is my body' and 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood,' demand reverent theological attention ([Luke 22:19–20](#)).

What Scripture does not provide is the scholastic claim that the substances of bread and wine cease while their accidents remain. Transubstantiation is a metaphysical explanation intended to defend real presence, not the direct wording of an apostolic text. It therefore cannot be made the biblical test of Christian orthodoxy. Christians may disagree about the mystery of Christ's presence while remaining bound to what Scripture clearly requires: remembrance of Christ, proclamation of his death, communion in him, unity of the body, self-examination, and faithful reception.

The sacrificial language of the Mass raises an even more direct textual concern. Catholic theology distinguishes sacramental re-presentation from a new crucifixion, and that distinction should be honored. Yet Hebrews deliberately grounds assurance in the non-repeatability and perfection of Christ's offering. Any Eucharistic theology must therefore guard the finality of 'once for all' rather than creating a practical impression that ordained priests continually supply sacrificial satisfaction unavailable through Christ's completed work ([Hebrews 10:10–18](#)).

21.6 Confession, absolution, and satisfaction

Scripture commands confession. Believers confess sins to God ([1 John 1:9](#)) and to one another where reconciliation and prayer require it ([James 5:16](#)). Christ gives the apostolic mission authority to announce forgiveness and discipline the church ([John 20:21–23](#); [Matthew 18:15–20](#)). Pastoral confession can therefore be wise, healing, and biblically defensible.

The New Testament does not, however, establish mandatory annual auricular confession to a priest as the ordinary condition for ecclesial standing. Nor does forgiveness rest on completing satisfactions that supplement Christ's atoning sufficiency. Repentance bears fruit and restitution may be morally required, as Zacchaeus demonstrates ([Luke 19:8–10](#)), but restitution is fruit of repentance, not a second atonement. Good works follow salvation; they do not complete Christ's propitiation.

21.7 Purgatory and indulgences

Roman Catholic theology can appeal to [1 Corinthians 3:12–15](#), prayer for the dead in 2 Maccabees, and early Christian practice to support postmortem purification. Within a Protestant canonical framework, 2 Maccabees is historically valuable but not a final doctrinal authority. First Corinthians 3 clearly teaches an eschatological testing of work, but its fire tests the quality of ministry and does not plainly describe a temporary purgatorial punishment removable by ecclesiastical suffrage.

Other New Testament passages emphasize the immediacy and sufficiency of belonging to Christ. The repentant criminal is promised paradise with Christ ([Luke 23:43](#)); Paul desires to depart and be with Christ ([Philippians 1:23](#)); death is followed by judgment ([Hebrews 9:27](#)); Christ's sacrifice perfects those being sanctified ([Hebrews 10:14](#)). These texts do not support a necessary postmortem purification governed by remissible temporal punishment for believers justified in Christ.

Indulgences face an even sharper evidentiary problem. Scripture nowhere grants popes or bishops authority to dispense a treasury of merits to remit post-forgiveness temporal punishment for the living or dead. The communion of saints is real, and believers benefit from one another's prayer and service. But Christ himself is the inexhaustible treasure of righteousness and redemption. The medieval indulgence system therefore represents a theological development without sufficient apostolic warrant, and the commercialization that sometimes surrounded it aggravated rather than created the underlying problem.

21.8 Saints, Mary, relics, and invocation

Scripture commands Christians to remember faithful examples ([Hebrews 13:7](#)) and presents the redeemed in heaven as alive to God. Revelation depicts heavenly figures offering prayers symbolically before God ([Revelation 5:8](#)). Mary is uniquely blessed among women, the mother of the incarnate Lord, and an exemplary servant of faith ([Luke 1:38, 42, 46–55](#)). Christians should not correct medieval excess by dishonoring Mary or forgetting faithful saints.

The apostolic pattern of prayer, however, is directed to God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The New Testament never instructs churches to address departed saints, petition Mary for heavenly intervention, or approach God through a graded network of celestial patrons. The one mediator is Christ ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)), and believers are invited to approach the throne of grace confidently through him ([Hebrews 4:14–16](#)). Catholic theology's distinction between veneration and adoration prevents a false accusation of formal polytheism, but it does not itself supply positive apostolic warrant for invocation.

Relics require similar restraint. God can work miracles through material means, as Scripture shows, but extraordinary events do not establish a normative economy of relic collection, pilgrimage, multiplication, authentication, or spiritual benefit. The biblical principle is not that matter is unspiritual. Christianity is incarnational and sacramental in the broad sense. The principle is that faith must not assign to created objects a confidence Scripture reserves for God.

21.9 Celibacy, monastic vows, and evangelical poverty

The medieval church rightly honored disciplines Scripture itself values: prayer, fasting, simplicity, generosity, sexual purity, and voluntary celibacy. Paul explicitly values singleness for those given that gift because it can enable undivided service ([1 Corinthians 7:7, 32–35](#)). Jesus calls disciples to costly renunciation. Monastic reforms often exposed real worldliness and preserved disciplines from which the wider church benefited.

The problem is hierarchy of holiness when voluntary disciplines become a superior spiritual estate or universal clerical law. The same Paul assumes overseers may be husbands and fathers ([1 Timothy 3:2–5](#)) and warns against teachings that forbid marriage as though created goods were inherently defiling ([1 Timothy 4:1–5](#)). Colossians warns that severe treatment of the body can have an appearance of wisdom without power over sinful desire ([Colossians 2:20–23](#)). Biblical asceticism is disciplined freedom under Christ, not a meritorious ladder to a higher class of Christianity.

21.10 Crusade, inquisition, and the coercive sword

The New Testament gives civil government a genuine coercive role in restraining evil ([Romans 13:1–7](#)). Christians may therefore debate just-war criteria and the legitimate defense of communities without embracing pacifism as the only possible reading of every political circumstance. The question of crusade, however, is more specific: can the Church attach penitential or salvific privilege to armed violence carried out under ecclesiastical authorization?

Jesus tells Pilate that his kingdom is not of the kind whose servants fight to prevent his arrest ([John 18:36](#)). Apostolic ministry fights with spiritual rather than fleshly weapons ([2 Corinthians 10:3–5](#)). Heretics are to be corrected, warned, and eventually rejected from fellowship, not tortured into confession ([2 Timothy 2:24–26](#); [Titus 3:10–11](#)). The church disciplines through truth, exclusion, prayer, and pastoral authority. It does not receive the civil sword as a means of producing faith.

Crusading indulgences and inquisitorial coercion therefore represent serious departures from apostolic method. Political rulers may have responsibilities for public order, but the church cannot make violence meritorious, nor can it authenticate doctrine by force. The martyr church of the first centuries knew that coerced worship is not faith. The later alliance of ecclesiastical judgment with imprisonment, torture, confiscation, and execution requires explicit biblical rejection.

21.11 Scripture, vernacular access, and the right to test teaching

Medieval authorities were right that Scripture can be distorted. Peter himself warns that unstable people twist difficult writings ([2 Peter 3:16](#)), and the New Testament gives teachers responsibility to guard doctrine. The answer to misinterpretation, however, is faithful teaching rather than institutional possession of the Word. The Bereans are commended for testing apostolic preaching against Scripture ([Acts 17:11](#)). Paul expects letters to be read among churches ([Colossians 4:16](#)). Scripture equips the person of God for every good work ([2 Timothy 3:16–17](#)).

There is no biblical warrant for a system in which access to God's Word or the right to proclaim its clear gospel depends absolutely on clerical permission. Churches need trained teachers, accountable translation, and protection against false doctrine. They also need the Word itself to remain capable of judging teachers, councils, bishops, and popes. That asymmetry is central to *Sola Scriptura*: the Church recognizes, teaches, defends, translates, and interprets Scripture, but the Church remains under the Scripture it receives.

21.12 What the medieval reformers corrected, and where they remained incomplete

The medieval reform movements examined here frequently identified genuine problems. Gregorian reform attacked simony and secular capture of office. Cistercians and Franciscans protested wealth and spiritual complacency. Dominicans recognized the need for serious preaching and theological education. Waldensians recovered vernacular proclamation and apostolic simplicity. Wycliffe challenged corrupt wealth, institutional absolutism, and transubstantiation while elevating Scripture. Hus called clergy to moral accountability, emphasized Christ's headship, and defended reform preaching. Conciliarists confronted the practical impossibility of an unaccountable papal office during schism. The *Devotio Moderna* called Christians beyond externalism to imitation of Christ. Humanists recovered languages and sources.

None of these corrections automatically established full apostolic fidelity. Gregorian reform strengthened papal monarchy. Mendicants remained inside the sacramental system. Waldensian theology evolved under pressure and was not identical to later Reformed doctrine. Wycliffe and Hus retained important medieval assumptions and produced movements with internal theological diversity. Conciliarism could correct popes yet still condemn and execute dissenters. Humanism could clarify texts without clarifying justification. The repeated historical lesson is that exposing one error does not guarantee freedom from others.

The final norm must therefore remain the apostolic gospel itself. Reform is Christian not because it is old or new, institutional or dissident, successful or persecuted, but because it brings doctrine and life into conformity with the Word of God.

22. Contemporary Significance

The medieval period remains immediately relevant because several doctrines systematized or intensified in these centuries continue as official Roman Catholic teaching. The Catholic Church today confesses seven sacraments, transubstantiation, sacramental priesthood, purgatory, indulgences, intercession of saints, distinctive Marian devotion, and universal papal primacy, although contemporary formulations often include careful qualifications and have developed beyond medieval expressions (Catholic Church, 1997, paras. 882, 1030–1032, 1210, 1376, 1471, 1547–1548). Modern Catholic teaching, for example, explicitly distinguishes Marian veneration from adoration, defines indulgence as remission of temporal punishment after guilt has been forgiven, and treats popular piety as subordinate to liturgy and subject to pastoral purification. Historical criticism should therefore engage current doctrine rather than treating every medieval abuse as if it were contemporary official teaching.

The same history is relevant to Protestant self-understanding. Protestantism did not emerge from a Bible-reading vacuum. Medieval monasteries preserved manuscripts. Universities trained exegetes. Scholastic argument sharpened theological questions. Humanists revived languages. Catholic printers produced Bibles and devotional works. Reform orders attacked corruption before Luther. A historically responsible Protestant theology can therefore reject doctrines judged unscriptural without imagining that Christ abandoned his people for a millennium.

The history also matters for ecumenical dialogue. Catholic-Orthodox debates over primacy, Catholic-Protestant debates over justification and sacraments, and wider Christian disagreements over ministry and tradition are unintelligible without medieval development. Many present controversies are disputes not about whether Scripture matters, but about the authority by which later doctrinal conclusions become binding and how historical development relates to apostolic revelation.

Finally, medieval Christianity offers a warning applicable to every tradition. Institutions can begin as solutions to real problems and later acquire authority difficult to question. Reform movements can correctly identify one corruption while generating new absolutisms. Intellectual sophistication can become a shield against biblical correction. Popular devotion can be sincere and still misdirected. Political protection can preserve churches and also tempt them to use coercion. The genealogy therefore teaches not contempt for the past but vigilance: every church, including churches that call themselves reformed or biblical, must remain reformable under the Word of God.

23. Genealogical Summary

Table 5. Genealogical summary of Chapter 6

Field	Chapter 6 genealogy
Parent tradition	Latin Chalcedonian Christianity in communion with the Roman see, emerging from the first-millennium Western church and increasingly differentiated from Byzantine Christianity.
Approximate emergence	No single founding date. The chapter traces institutional and doctrinal consolidation from the conventional East-West Schism of 1054 to 1516.

Field	Chapter 6 genealogy
Principal geographical center	Rome as the chief ecclesiastical center, with major developments across France, the Holy Roman Empire, England, Iberia, Italy, Bohemia, the Low Countries, and wider Western/Central Europe.
Principal actors	Gregory VII; Henry IV; Urban II; Innocent III; Gratian; Peter Lombard; Francis of Assisi; Dominic; Thomas Aquinas; Bonaventure; Boniface VIII; Catherine of Siena; Valdes; John Wycliffe; Jan Hus; conciliarists at Constance/Basel; Lorenzo Valla; Johannes Gutenberg; Desiderius Erasmus; numerous bishops, canonists, friars, monastics, lay confraternities, dissenters, rulers, and printers.
Immediate triggers of major developments	Reform of simony and lay investiture; crusading mobilization; anti-heresy campaigns; sacramental and scholastic systematization; papal-imperial conflict; Avignon and Western Schism; demands for vernacular preaching and Scripture; Hussite crisis; humanist textual criticism; printing.
Deeper causes	Expansion of papal jurisdiction; church wealth and political integration; need for legal and pastoral uniformity; clerical reform; intellectual systematization; penitential anxiety; popular devotion; monarchical state formation; literacy; urbanization; university culture; recurring corruption; communication change.
Authority structure	Scripture interpreted within an authoritative tradition; papal primacy and decretals; episcopal hierarchy; ecumenical and regional councils; canon law; scholastic theology; sacramental priesthood; monastic and religious orders. Conciliarism later contested the relation between pope and universal council.
Principal doctrinal distinctives consolidated	Seven-sacrament system; transubstantiation; sacrificial Eucharistic theology; annual sacramental confession; developed purgatory and indulgence theology; expanded saint and Marian devotion; stronger papal supremacy claims; differentiated clerical priesthood.
Immediate branches / reform currents	Waldensian dissent; Lollard networks; Hussite/Utraquist movement; Unitas Fratrum; conciliar reform currents; Devotio Moderna; biblical humanism. These are not all direct descendants of one another.
Later descendants	Roman Catholicism as clarified after Trent; Waldensian-Reformed churches; Protestant traditions influenced in differing degrees by Wycliffite, Hussite, humanist, and late medieval reform environments; Moravian tradition through the Unity of the Brethren; continuing Catholic religious orders and scholastic schools.
Present-day presence	Roman Catholic doctrine still preserves many mediievally consolidated teachings; Waldensian churches survive within the Reformed family; Moravian churches preserve a complex genealogy through the Unity of the Brethren; mediieval scholastic and devotional sources remain influential across Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant scholarship.
Major biblical questions raised	Does Scripture establish universal papal jurisdiction? Does it authorize a sevenfold grace-conferring sacramental system, sacerdotal mediation, transubstantiation, purgatory, indulgences, invocation of saints, Marian intercession, mandatory clerical celibacy, or coercion of heresy? How should churches distinguish legitimate doctrinal development from additions that bind conscience without apostolic warrant?

24. Conclusion and Transition: A Church Both Reforming and in Need of Reform

From 1054 to 1516, Western Christianity became the mature mediieval Latin system inherited by the sixteenth century. The papacy emerged from the Gregorian reform movement with stronger claims, legal machinery, and transnational reach. Canon law disciplined a vast ecclesiastical society. Crusading fused penitence with warfare and, in 1204, inflicted a wound on Eastern Christianity that hardened the earlier schism. Scholastic theology organized doctrine with extraordinary intellectual precision. The seven sacraments became a coherent system; transubstantiation acquired conciliar and philosophical definition; confession, satisfaction, purgatory, and indulgences formed an integrated penitential economy; saints, relics, pilgrimage, and Marian devotion shaped daily piety.

This development was not simply corruption. Mediieval Christianity produced serious biblical preaching, charity, education, art, mission, intellectual achievement, monastic renewal, and pastoral care. Its own institutions repeatedly recognized the need for reform. Cistercians, Franciscans, Dominicans, mystics, parish reformers, conciliarists, and the Devotio Moderna all demonstrate internal vitality. Humanists recovered languages and sources. The very church that would later resist Protestantism preserved and generated many of the texts, schools, methods, and communication networks that Protestant reformers would use.

Nor were pre-Reformation dissenters one hidden denomination. The Waldensians began as an evangelical poverty and preaching movement before developing a durable separate identity. Wycliffe's reform arose from an English scholastic and political setting. Hus received Wycliffite influence but generated a distinct Bohemian movement. Hussitism produced multiple branches, including the Unity of the Brethren. Their histories intersect, but they cannot be collapsed into an invented uninterrupted Protestant succession.

Theologically, the period reveals both faithful preservation and consequential development. The mediieval church continued to confess the Trinity, incarnation, bodily resurrection, divine creation, final judgment, and the necessity of grace. Yet its

institutional and sacramental system also accumulated claims that cannot simply be read from the apostolic text. Universal papal jurisdiction, a sacerdotal sacrificial order, transubstantiation as a binding metaphysical test, purgatorial satisfaction, indulgence treasury, invocation of saints, Marian intercession, and coercive enforcement of faith require biblical warrant stronger than historical antiquity or ecclesiastical definition alone can provide.

By 1516 these questions had become unusually volatile. Papal monarchy had survived its greatest medieval legitimacy crisis but not erased conciliar memory. Reform councils had diagnosed abuses without resolving all of them. Humanists had demonstrated that authoritative texts could be tested philologically. Printing could turn local debate into international controversy. Erasmus had just published a Greek New Testament that invited Western scholars to compare inherited translation and theology with the apostolic text. Political rulers possessed the power to protect reformers from ecclesiastical punishment. Indulgence campaigns joined theology, pastoral care, papal finance, and public preaching in one visible practice.

The next chapter begins at the point where these medieval inheritances collide. In 1517 Martin Luther did not set out to found Protestantism. He entered a long-standing debate about repentance and indulgences as an Augustinian friar, priest, and university theologian inside the medieval Catholic Church. What transformed his protest into a break was not one thesis or one abuse, but a widening dispute over grace, Scripture, sacramental authority, papal jurisdiction, and the nature of the Church itself. The medieval seeds of reform were about to become the breaking of Western Christendom.

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