CHRISTIAN HISTORY

1201-1300 C.E.

June 17, 2026

SUMMARY OF THIS CENTURY

General Development: Major changes in European society began or accelerated in this century. Papal power began the century stronger than ever, but was declining by the end of the 1200s. Repeated Crusades proved costly and achieved little. Reform movements ran strong, spurred by the growth of academic study in the schools and universities that had been started by the church. A renewed emphasis on reason began to challenge the authority of the church.

Key Questions: Will the church ever truly be one body of all people under one (human) head? What authority do the popes really have? Will the Eastern and Western churches ever reunite? How do we know what is true: by faith or by reason?

Key Places: the universities (especially Paris and Oxford) • **Constantinople** (which falls to Western forces and later is restored to the Byzantine Empire)

Key People: Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, Dominic

Key Dates:

1204 — The Byzantine Empire falls

1215 — Fourth Lateran Council makes the doctrine of transubstantiation official

1215 — England's nobles and king sign the Magna Carta

1229 — The Synod of Toulouse sets guidelines for eradicating heretics

1232 — Authority over the Inquisition is given to Dominicans and Franciscans

1261 — A weaker Byzantine Empire is restored

1) OVERVIEW OF THIS CENTURY

In many ways it was the Roman Catholic Church's greatest and worst century. On the positive side, it featured grand Gothic architecture, powerful popes, new religious orders, and outstanding academics and writers (Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, etc.). On the negative side, it was a time of tremendous violence and trouble, featuring bloody crusades, increasing tension between church and state, destruction of the Byzantine Empire, new ideas that threatened the church's absolute authority, and the Inquisition.

2) SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

- ESTONIA resisted Christianity in the early 1200s, but evangelism there was strong by mid-century.
- In RUSSIA, Mongol conquests that threatened Russian society also deepened Christian convictions.
- In CHINA, Franciscan friar John de Monte Corvino (1246-ca. 1330) traveled through Persia, Ethiopia, India, and as far as Peking before 1300 and baptized 6,000 in Peking alone. He had 30,000 converts by 1300, but the Ming dynasty destroyed the church in 1368.

3) POPE INNOCENT III, RULER OF EUROPE (lived 1161-1216, pope 1198-1216)

INNOCENT III

- Near the end of the 1100s, Innocent had humiliated French king Philip II, forcing him to take back his wife, whom he had rejected.
- GERMANY / HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE — In 1202, Innocent declared his right to approve or disapprove the emperor chosen by the German nobles, because the political ruler gets his authority from the pope as the moon gets its light from the sun. Against the nobles, he supported Otto IV, who took the throne after a 10-year civil war. Later Otto defied the pope by trying to take power over Italy, so the pope helped Otto's nephew Frederick take the throne.
- ENGLAND — In 1208, when the pope and King John Lackland argued over who would be the next archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Innocent excommunicated John and ordered the churches in England closed. Innocent also threatened to authorize King Philip II in France to invade England on a crusade (which Philip was glad to do). King John gave in and in 1212 acknowledged that England and Ireland belonged to the pope who, in return, let John rule them in return for homage and tribute money.
- Under Innocent III, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) instituted several changes that Innocent advocated:
  - Transubstantiation became the official doctrine of the church.
  - The Inquisition was instituted: every bishop was to inquire about any presence of heresy in his diocese and destroy any he found.
  - Every cathedral (church with a bishop) was to have a school that was open to the poor.
  - Clergy were required to abstain from games, hunting, the theater, and other pastimes.
  - Every Christian was to confess their sins at least once a year and go to Mass at least at Easter.
  - No new relics were allowed without papal approval.
  - Jews & Muslims in Christian lands were required to wear distinctive garments to identify them.
  - Priests were forbidden to charge fees for administration of the sacraments.
- In Innocent's time, the pope was considered more than human, with divine authority over all that people might do. All (Christian) people were one flock under one shepherd, the pope.

4) CHURCH LIFE IN THE WEST

- LORD'S SUPPER: The doctrine of transubstantiation—that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper become the actual body and blood of Christ when consecrated by the words of the priest—made the Lord's Supper a sacrificing of Jesus' body and blood every time they were shared. The priest "sacrificed" Christ anew for the sake of the gathered believers. This view of the Supper caused people to fear the clergy, who had the power to withhold the sacred, life-giving sacraments whenever they chose. (The cup was actually withheld anyway; believers took only the bread. Roman Catholic teaching stated that the body and blood were both present in both the bread and the wine.)
- MUSIC: Church music had been becoming less participatory and more elaborate for centuries. Polyphonic music (containing many melodic lines) was developed around this time and was sung by trained choirs. Congregational singing essentially ended.
- ARCHITECTURE: Gothic architecture was in full swing. Construction of the great Gothic cathedral of Cologne began in 1248. It was finished in 1880.
- CHRISTIANS AND JEWS: Christians grew more oppressive and violent toward Jews as Christians began to sense that they might gain total victory in evangelizing Europe. Beginning in 1215, Jews and Muslims were required to wear distinct clothing to mark themselves as non-Christians. Jews were also forbidden to blaspheme Christ, be elected to office, or (once baptized) reconvert to Judaism. In the 1240s in

France, the Talmud was burned because of its many errors and blasphemies. Even Christian leaders who tried to preserve it were denounced. Jews tended to have a better life in Eastern Europe, where legislation often protected the rights and safety of Jews.

- THE JUBILEE: In 1300, Boniface VIII (1294-1303) instituted the first Jubilee Year. Everyone who came to St. Peter's Basilica to repent of sins was promised full forgiveness. Such a visit involved payment of money, and so the year was very profitable for the papacy—enough so that later popes held further jubilees as well (the next one was in 1350).
- REUNIFICATION UNSUCCESSFUL: At the Council of Lyons (1274), Pope Gregory X (1271-1276) and Byzantine Emperor Michael Palaeologus (1261-1282), who had re-formed the fallen Byzantine Empire in 1261, tried to reunite the Eastern and Western Church. They agreed to unite, but unity was not achieved because the Byzantine Church could not accept the doctrine of papal supremacy.

- THE GROWING DISTANCE BETWEEN CLERGY AND THE MASSES: *"Where the Church lost touch with the masses was in towns where industries were heavily concentrated… The Church identified with the rich and powerful who could contribute to the building of great churches, cathedrals, and monasteries, and it ignored the laborers who worked long hours in tedious and dehumanizing jobs and who found companionship and support in parachurch organizations rather than in the great Church. Preoccupied with a battle for power going on at another level, the hierarchical Church ignored the cries of the powerless long enough for them to earn such popular sympathy that it took crusades, inquisitions, and new religious orders either to stamp them out or to win them back to the Church.*

  "The wide gap between Church and people in everyday life was reinforced in what should have united them, that is, in the worship of the church. The service was in Latin, the language of priests which many of them did not understand. Indeed, according to a contemporary source, Lewis, the bishop of Durham between 1316 and 1333, though of noble birth, did not understand Latin and could hardly pronounce it… If the bishop had such a problem, them imagine where lay persons stood! Priests rarely preached, though many must have offered good pastoral care." E. Glenn Hinson, The Church Triumphant: A History of Christianity up to 1300, page 451

5) MAJOR CHANGES IN SOCIETY

- In ENGLAND, English barons forced King John to sign the *Magna Carta* on June 15, 1215. It protected the rights of the barons and limited the power of the king; it also guaranteed certain rights and protections to the church. It provided that the king would not be above the law, and thereby provided a foundation for modern governments that limit executive power. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, probably helped mediate the dispute between the rebellious barons and the king that led to this agreement, though against the desire of the pope.
- A rising MIDDLE CLASS and the organization of national armies made rising nation-states like England and France less and less dependent on the popes, and increasingly likely to dispute with them.
- By the end of the 1200s, PAPAL POWER had decreased significantly. To pay for a war between England and France, the kings of both nations taxed the clergy. Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303), who claimed absolute power over monarchs, forbade the clergy to pay such taxes. In England, King Edward responded by outlawing the clergy. In France, King Philip IV prohibited the exporting of money from France to Italy, thereby cutting off the pope's French revenues.
- SPAIN: By 1252, nearly all of Spain had been reconquered by non-Muslim forces. The city of Toledo, through the leadership of the local archbishop, became a center of academic excellence.

6) REFORM MOVEMENTS: FRANCISCANS & DOMINICANS

• THE FRANCISCANS — Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) wanted most of all to follow Jesus. Breaking from his somewhat wealthy family and easy life, he chose to live a life of poverty modeled after the life to which Jesus had called the rich young ruler. He preached and preferred to reach out to unbelievers through love rather than through the violence of the Crusades. His followers became the Franciscans. They emphasized care for the poor and mission work.

- A dear friend, Clare, founded a sister group for women, called the "Poor Clares".

• THE DOMINICANS — Dominic (1170-1221), a Spanish priest, focused on following Jesus not through poverty, but through preaching, and on the preparation of preachers through education. He pitied the "heretics" (Albigenses, etc.) of southern France and proposed to fight heresy with persuasion instead of with the use of force.

- His followers became the Dominicans. They emphasized preaching and apologetics and were commonly considered the best preachers of their era. As friars, they preached in the languages of the people and sent out many missionaries. Their official name was The Order of Preachers.
- Dominicans, as studious scholars, became the most notable professors of theology in Europe's universities. The greatest Dominican scholar was Thomas Aquinas, who developed the Roman Catholic Church's present system of theology. Dominican preachers' training and knowledge far exceeded that of the average priest.
- A Dominican saying: "The bow is first bent in study, and then it sends the arrow in preaching."

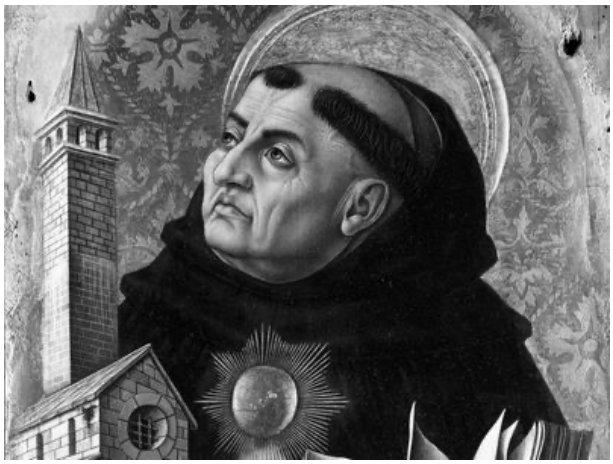
7) THE INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT

The universities that grew out of the cathedral schools of the 1100s were now major centers of learning and the spread of knowledge. Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of Paris were among the leading universities. The leading question of the time was the question of how reason relates to faith: Which is more trustworthy? Which holds greater authority?

• ALBERT THE GREAT (Albertus; ca. 1200-1280)

- a Dominican theologian — Argued that philosophy and reason can explain many things, but faith based on revelation from God can explain even more. He said, "Revelation is above but not contrary to reason."

• THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274)



- Nephew of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany), Thomas became a Dominican monk against his parents' wishes. Later he became a renowned professor at the University of Paris. He was Albert's most famous student. He came to believe that both faith and reason are from God, and there is no essential contradiction between them. He wrote on the nature of God and of the Trinity, on human fallenness, and on the human will. He became one of the greatest theologians of church history. He joined faith and reason together in a new way. His work is still influential today.

• BONAVENTURE (1221-1274)

- Became the leading Franciscan theologian of the 1200s. He believed reason must be interpreted through faith, because faith in necessary to achieve correct understanding. For example, reason suggests that matter is eternal, but by revelation from God in Scripture we know it is not, for God created matter out of nothing.

8) THE CRUSADES OF THE 1200s

PHILOSOPHY/THEOLOGY: The popes argued that the ministry of warfare is sometimes necessary to combat the devil's work against the faith, to squelch impiety and unbelief; it is an act of love, repaying Christ for what he did for us. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) used military force widely, believing that as the vicar of Christ he had a responsibility to use every power available to him to promote the political and spiritual health of all mankind. Roger Bacon argued in 1268 that only preaching would win unbelievers to Christ; military monks and the use of coercive force hindered belief in Jesus. He thought people would come to Christ gladly if, while doing so, they were allowed to retain their freedom.

THE 4TH CRUSADE (1198-1204) — Muslim Egypt had taken control of Jerusalem in 1187. Pope Innocent III, supported mostly by the French, agreed to hire 50 warships from Venice to transport troops who would attack the enemy in Egypt and the Holy Land. But the church couldn't raise enough money, so they agreed to capture the rich trading city of Zara from the Christian king of Hungary for the ruler of Venice in exchange for the ships. Zara was captured by the crusaders in 1202. While they were there, rebels in the Byzantine Empire (which had been weakened by previous crusades) requested help taking the Byzantine throne. They offered, in exchange, money, troops for the crusade, and the reuniting of the Orthodox (Eastern) Church with the Roman Catholic (Western) Church. French officials and the leading bishops agreed. They attacked Constantinople in July 1203, and it fell in April 1204. The crusaders plundered it for three days. Then they kept the city for themselves, setting up a new Latin Empire of Constantinople that would continue until 1261. The Byzantine Empire was left with nothing but a little land around the city of Nicaea. The crusade to the Holy Land was forgotten. Ironically, Roman control of Constantinople did essentially unite the Eastern and Western churches for some 57 years. The Eastern Church, though, never forgot what Western Christians had done to them; bitterness between the two branches of Christianity increased.

THE EAST BALTIC CRUSADES (1200-1292) — Armed monks and national forces repeatedly pressed into northeastern Europe (Estonia, Prussia, Finland, etc.) to conquer territory for Christ, adding it to Christian lands and converting the people there mostly by force.

CRUSADE IN FRANCE (1209-1218) — Innocent III sent forces against the Albigenses (also called the Cathari) of southern France in 1209. This group (probably a conglomeration of groups) claimed their beliefs were based on the Bible, so the Roman church later forbade people to possess the Bible. The crusade against them was very bloody and nearly exterminated them in southern France.

THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE (1212) — A boy named Stephen, age 12, gathered a following of about 100,000 French children ages 12-18, and a boy named Nicholas led a second group of children from Germany. They intended to capture the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (supposed site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection) in Jerusalem, which armed knights had been unable to take. They believed the poorest and purest would be able to do what the mighty could not. In July 1212 they set out for Rome. The only ruler who tried to stop these children was the king of France. The French children marched up the Rhine River and then over the Alps into Italy. They reached Genoa on August 25. It's unclear what happened after that. Apparently many of the children ended up in Marseilles. There, merchants provided seven ships to transport them. Two of the ships wrecked off the island of Sardinia. The others carried the children to slave markets in North Africa and Egypt. Among both groups, some children returned home, but most died by hunger or violence or were enslaved.

THE FIFTH CRUSADE (1217) — The crusaders attacked Egypt to weaken it in preparation for an assault on Palestine. After two years, they did finally take one city on the Egyptian coast, but squabbling among their leaders weakened them, and Muslim forces pushed them out of Egypt. The crusade accomplished pretty much nothing.

THE SIXTH CRUSADE (1228-1229) — Against the pope's orders, Emperor Frederick II (1220-1250) of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) sailed with his forces to Acre in northwest Israel (near modern Haifa). He did not conquer, but negotiated at length with the sultan there. They agreed to a treaty that gave

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth to Frederick, though Muslims retained control of the temple mount, the Dome of the Rock, and the al-Aqsa mosque.

THE SEVENTH CRUSADE (1248-1254) — Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) called a crusade to support Western forces in the Holy Land, and French King Louis IX led it. He took the city of Damietta on the Egyptian coast in 1249, then tried to attack Cairo, but illness devastated his army. He surrendered to the Muslims in 1250 and was held for a huge ransom, which the crusaders paid. A civil war among the Muslims there allowed him to secure the release of many of his captured troops, and they moved into the Holy Land and ruled it 1250-1254. Then, realizing he could not continue to hold the region, he returned to France.

THE EIGHTH CRUSADE (1270-1271) — It was hardly a crusade. In 1263-1268, Baibars, Sultan of Egypt, conquered and devastated the Holy Land. In 1267, Louis IX agreed to crusade again. He arrived at Tunis and tried to convert the sultan—but Louis died from a fever on August 25, 1270. King Edward I of England sailed to Tunis, then to Acre, arriving in 1271. He negotiated an 11-year truce with Baibars. Christian forces tried to retain control of the Holy Land until 1291, when they gave up.

THE LITHUANIAN CRUSADE (1283-1410) — Teutonic Knights fought the Lithuanians from 1283 to 1410, in theory because the Lithuanians had remained pagan. As crusades elsewhere ended, a surplus of men who wanted to fight but could no longer do so in the Holy Land came to the northeast to join in the "crusades" there.

9) EFFECTS OF THE CRUSADES

1) Crusaders held Antioch for 170 years, but only held Jerusalem off and on. Most of the crusades were tremendously costly failures.

2) The Crusades weakened the Byzantine Empire, which Muslims to conquer Asia Minor in the 1400s.

3) Mistrust and enmity between Christians and Muslims and between Latin (Western Roman Catholic) and Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox) Christians increased. Much blood had been spilled. The Fourth Crusade in particular devastated East-West church relations.

4) Papal power increased and then decreased. It increased as popes called for crusades and appointed their leaders. It decreased as crusades fell apart and proved largely worthless, discrediting the popes.

5) Christians' attention returned to the narratives of the Bible as Crusaders battled in the Holy Land and pilgrims traveled there. This new focus highlighted the humanity of Jesus in popular thought. It also added energy to the veneration of relics (pieces of the True Cross, bones of the patriarchs, etc.).

6) Monasticism was changed by the addition of military monastic orders (Knights Templar, etc.).

7) A military thrust was added to efforts to combat heresy. "Crusades" were carried out against the Albigenses in France, the pagans in Lithuania, etc. Both non-Catholics and those Catholics who tried to defend the targeted peoples were slaughtered.

8) Crusades ironically opened communication and trade routes with the Muslim East. That trade increased production of tradable items in European cities, which led to increased production, which then built up the European middle class (primarily merchants). The strong middle class would later topple or decrease the power of Europe's nobility and monarchs.

9) As many knights and nobles went off to war and never returned, the power of feudal lords decreased. Many sold property to raise money for the crusades. Cities gradually gained freedom from feudal lords, and kings had to rely on the middle class for their power base.

10) Persuasion, not the use of force, became the preferred strategy for dealing with Muslims, unbelievers, and heretics. *Raymond Lull (ca. 1235-1315), of Majorca, established a training college in 1276 for missionaries who would take the gospel to Muslim lands to win converts by persuasion. The Franciscans similarly began as a mission-oriented group.*

9) Exposure to Eastern thought reopened the West to learning (science, mathematics, philosophy, etc.) that had declined during the Dark Ages.

10) THE DECLINE OF THE PAPACY

- During the 1200s, the popes became increasingly political, claiming full authority, without any accountability to other human beings. Because they ruled lands and managed relations with kings over whom they claimed power, they needed a huge bureaucracy, which in turn required vast amounts of money. They focused less on religious matters and more on political functions. (Pope John XXII, 1316-1334, would spend 63 percent of his resources on war.) As popes grew more extreme in their claims and political functions, the papacy fell into greater disrepute.
- Education, sponsored by the church itself, gradually decreased the power of the papacy as universities trained lawyers who later argued against papal claims to special authority. The Renaissance, beginning in the 1300s, was built on the growth of academia, and it spurred informed, intellectual criticism of the church, including the popes.
- New economic forces that did not depend on the church or the popes arose in the cities: guilds, banks, new manufacturing processes, etc. These forces freed kings and citizens from the church's control.
- Every time a crusade went out of control, it decreased the influence of the pope(s) who had authorized it.
- By claiming authority even over kings, the popes distanced themselves from the spiritual needs and daily concerns of the common people.
- Centralization of spiritual authority in the papacy left local churches with less authority, which caused local churches to lose their dynamism. Church members drifted from genuine devotion. Even well-intended groups like the Franciscans and Dominicans eventually were caught up in bureaucracy, particularly as they became inquisitors instead of church leaders caring for the poor.

11) THE INQUISITION *(not the Spanish Inquisition, which came later)*

- SAMPLE OF BREAKAWAY GROUPS
  - Abigenses (Cathari, "pure ones") — prioritized the Bible over church doctrine; some held to a dualistic theology (there's a good God and a bad God) and other unusual beliefs
  - Amalricians — said all things come from a single essence, and those in God's love cannot sin
  - Ortlibarii — held strange views of the Holy Spirit and of the Trinity
  - Waldenses — wanted to provide the Bible to all people in their own languages, preferred poverty (the Synod of Toulouse in 1229 forbade laypersons to use translations of the Bible in their own languages)
  - Many other independent groups also appeared during the 1100s-1200s.
- RESPONSE #1: WAR!
  - The crusade of 1209-1218 nearly wiped out the Albigenses.
- RESPONSE #2: PERSUASION, NOT FORCE
  - Dominicans and Franciscans worked to persuade the Albigenses and other "heretical" groups (those not adhering to Roman Catholic doctrine) and discouraged the use of force for conversion.
- RESPONSE #3: THE INQUISITION
  - At first, bishops were authorized to investigate and put an end to any heresies and heretical groups within their own dioceses.
  - Beginning in 1233, as the number of "heretical" groups increased, the Franciscans and Dominicans were put in charge of the Inquisition and authorized to seek out and end all heresies throughout Western Christendom.

- The Synod of Toulouse (1229) established the following rules for dealing with heretics:

…every secular or ecclesiastical official who spares a heretic shall be stripped of his land, office, or possessions; every house in which a heretic is found shall be torn down; heretics and those suspected of heresy shall not be allowed the services of a physician, even in the severest illness; those implicated in this same crime even if criminals shall be accepted as witnesses against heretics; confessions may be forced through torture; even the suspicion of heresy justifies imprisonment; the penalties for heresy [range] from the loss of rights of citizenship and church to the seizure of property and imprisonment [and] to execution, and this execution varied from simple decapitation or drowning to slow strangulation by the garotte and finally to a quick death through powder-explosions or on the funeral pile. — Hans Grimm, Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe, page 29

- The Inquisition spread across the entire Roman Catholic Church, except in the British Isles, Denmark, and Scandinavia.
- Goal: to terrorize any who even thought about deviating from the approved Roman Catholic faith.
- Process:
  1 — A person was reported to the Inquisitor as a suspected heretic.
  2 — A secret inquiry was held.
  3 — The accused would be required to appear before the Inquisitor. The accused was presumed guilty unless they could provide evidence of their Catholic faithfulness.
  4 — Any found to be heretics who refused to repent were handed over to the government to be burned at the stake.
  5 — Repentant heretics were often thrown into prison for life. Lesser punishments were also possible: confiscation of property, prayers, going to church, whippings, pilgrimages to the Holy Land, fines paid to the church. Often confiscated lands were divided between the church and the state.
  6 — Inquisitors could use essentially any means they wished. They could use deception and mental or physical torture to produce confessions.
  7 — The accused had no rights. Trials were held in secret. Anyone who defended a heretic could also be prosecuted for heresy. Defense of the accused was pretty much hopeless anyway.
  8 — Some who were accused sent bribes to Rome and were set free.

- The Inquisition stifled intellectual thought outside that which was sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church. Counterintuitively, persecution led more people to heretical beliefs. Both sides became more set in their positions, paving the way for the Reformation in the 1500s.

The Inquisition surely was one of the saddest chapters in the history of Christianity… No group of Christians ever were more confident that they did God and the Church a service than the inquisitors. Even the great Dominican Thomas Aquinas could justify the extermination of heretics who failed to repent…

The hierarchy [of the church] would probably have fared better had it left room for dissent and not enlisted state coercion to suppress it. — Hinson, 458 & 472