

Life Notes

THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

Pastor Stephen Chitty

#14. Summary of The Church in the Thirteenth Century

The Crusades had continued since the 11th century, and would continue throughout the 12th and most of the 13th centuries as well. The capture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187 was a particularly low point for Christendom. It was to many a sign of the failure of the Crusades. In the end, the Crusades did not achieve most of their objectives, but the end results remain somewhat difficult to thoroughly interpret and evaluate. Christianity was preserved and strengthened in northern and western Europe, but not in the eastern Mediterranean lands and generally not in the Holy Land. I do believe there are "just wars," and the rise of Islam was arguably a rallying point to defend and perpetuate Christianity. However, the wars were a mixture of sacred and profane, and may have done at least as much harm as good. We will discuss this question in detail in future chapters.

In spite of (or possibly because of) the Crusades, it is generally agreed that the supernatural, life-changing element of Christianity had become secularized by the 13th century. However, there were seeds of reformation that were continuing to break forth. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Benedictines and other Monastic groups continued to flourish. The Dominicans were organized in 1215, the Augustinians in 1256 and the Franciscans were founded by St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) in 1209.

St. Francis was a devout reformer who wanted to purge the Church from her reliance upon the sword. Though as a young man he was a soldier, he soon devoted his life to repentance and simple living. He is known as the Patron Saint of animals, a lover of the Eucharist, and his Franciscans would be allowed to remain in Israel as "Custodians of the Holy Land."

Thomas Aquinas is often thought of as one of the church's great scholastic minds. Scholasticism was an attempt to reconcile ancient

classical thinking with the Christian theology of the Middle Ages. Thomas sought to answer questions and therefore resolve apparent contradictions. This attempt is known as dialectical reasoning, in which a discourse between two or more people or views is put forth with the hopes of establishing agreed upon truth through reasonable arguments. Nicknamed "the dumb ox" by his fellow monks during the early years of his education, his teacher, Albertus Magnus, defended Francis by saying, "This dumb ox will fill the world with his bellowing." And he did!

His two greatest works were Summa Contra Gentiles (a Christian defense against paganism) and Summa Theologica (aka The Sum of Theology), a detailed explanation of Christian faith and doctrine. Thomas believed secular philosophy should be the "handmaiden of theology." In other words, all forms of study and science should ultimately point back to faith in God. Though not all of Thomas', writings would gain full acceptance in every branch of Christianity, he is honored highly throughout both the Catholic and Protestant worlds. He is the voice of orthodoxy to the Roman Church. To Protestants, he is a remarkable man who is lamented for retaining loyalty to what was considered abusive church authority.

Nonetheless, the seeds of revival were springing up, and the march of men and women who truly loved God continued into the 14th century.

Christian Life Church

803-798-4488

CLColumbia.com