Church History

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- *Introduction to Church History*
- *The Ancient Church* — AD *1ˢᵗ-3ʳᵈ centuries*
- *The Rise of Christendom* — AD *4ᵗʰ-5ᵗʰ centuries*
- *The Early Middle Ages* — AD *6ᵗʰ-10ᵗʰ centuries*
  - *The "Dark Ages" Overview*
  - *Flagrant Abuses of Authority: Zeno, Theodoric, and Clovis*
  - *Auctoritas Sacrata Pontificum: Gelasius*
  - *The Rise of the Monk: Benedict, Brendan and Dennis*

The Early Middle Ages
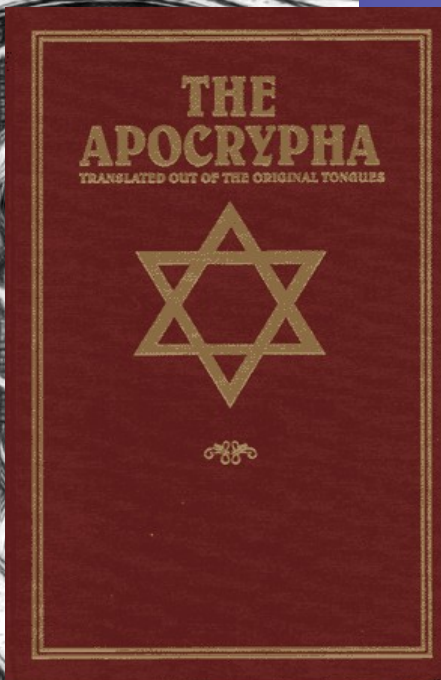
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  Strong leaders arose to grab power for themselves

The Early Middle Ages

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  492   Pope Gelasius I was elected in Rome
  - He declared that the church in Rome was sovereign over all of the other churches in a unified, worldwide, Catholic Church
  - He declared that the Church and the State were separate, without one having the right to judge the other—or the other's officials
  - He declared that the Pope—as leader of the sovereign church in Rome—is the Vicar of Christ (and thus, to stand against the Pope is to stand against God)
  - He declared the books of the *Apocrypha* to be fully Scripture, and began the process of book-burning of pagan authors such as Aristotle and Plato across Europe
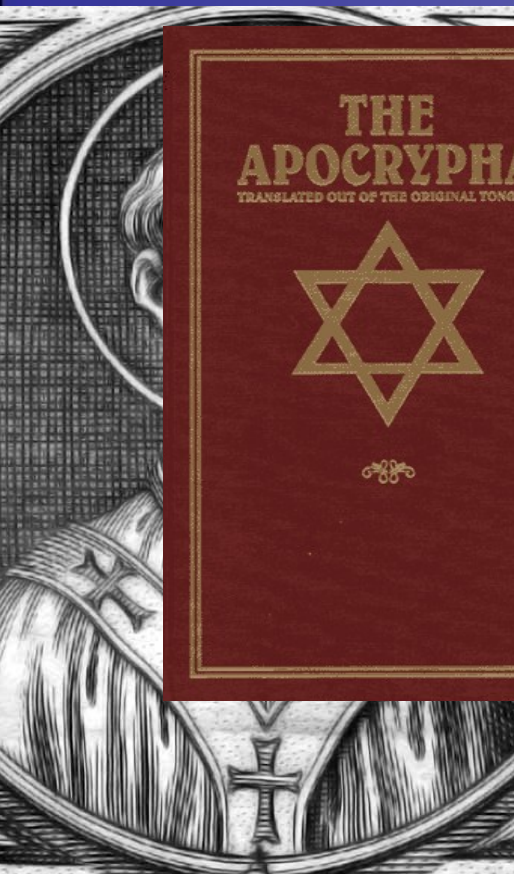
The Early Middle Ages

- Post-Roman leadership was up for grabs
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  - 492   Pope Gelasius I was elected in Rome
  - 496   Pope Gelasius I abolished *Lupercalia*
    - Even this far into the "Christian Era," the Roman people were still celebrating the pagan festival of Lupercalia

The Early Middle Ages

- Funky little teaching moment—
    - Lupercalia was a baudy pre-Roman festival that conflates the mythologies of the shepherd god Lupercus and the she-wolf named Lupa who raised the orphaned Romulus and Remus
        - Actually, it was also based on an even earlier Etruscan festival of purification called *Februalia*, named after the verb, *februare*— a word for ceremonial washing (which, by the way, gave the Romans the name of their month of purification, *Februarius,* which came between the months of the gatekeeper god, Janus, and the war god, Mars)

The Early Middle Ages

- Funky little teaching moment—
  - Lupercalia was a baudy pre-Roman festival that conflates the mythologies of the shepherd god Lupercus and the she-wolf named Lupa who raised the orphaned Romulus and Remus
    - The whole *point* was to purge yourself through *intense* dissipation—sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll
    - Young men would run naked through the streets, beating people with whips as they went along
      - Young women often *purposefully* got in their way so that they would be beaten, since it was believed that these beatings would make barren women fertile, and pregnant women give birth easier
        - And then there would be a lot of drinking and sex with strangers at orgies
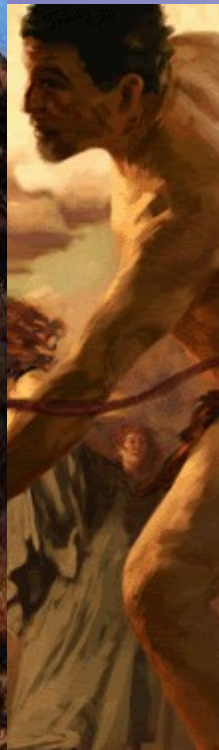
The Early Middle Ages

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    - In point of fact, it was in direct opposition to Lupercalia and to the Roman practice back in the 3rd century of prohibiting Roman soldiers to marry (so that they wouldn't settle down, but rather stay out on the battlefields) that the Roman priest, Valentinus, found himself imprisoned, since he argued for a *pure* and *holy* form of love
      - Valentinus was martyred during Lupercalia—on February 14

The Early Middle Ages

- Post-Roman leadership was up for grabs
  Strong leaders arose to grab power for themselves
  492   Pope Gelasius I was elected in Rome
  496   Pope Gelasius I abolished *Lupercalia*
    - Even this far into the "Christian Era," the Roman people were still celebrating the pagan festival of Lupercalia
    - Gelasius saw this festival as abominable, and decried those Christians who still took part in it
      - When the old Roman senators chuckled at his "prudishness," he replied, "If you believe that this rite has powers of health, celebrate it yourselves in the ancestral fashion; *run nude yourselves* that you may properly carry out this foolishness…"

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    - **To try to overshadow Lupercalia, Gelasius emphasized the celebration of the *Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary* (AKA *Candlemas*) on February 2 (or 40 days after Christmas)—the celebration of bringing Jesus to the Temple for His dedication**
      - But why focus on Mary's purification (*see Leviticus 12:2-6, Luke 2:22*) instead of on Christ's dedication when celebrating this event from Scripture?
        - It's to give February an *entirely different* focus on purification, women, and babies
        - Define "syncretism"

The Early Middle Ages

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  500   Monasteries became all the rage
    - Contrary to popular opinion nowadays, the life of a monk wasn't necessarily all that bleak in the Middle Ages
      - Monasteries were isolated and insulated from the rest of the world, so they tended to be relatively safe havens
        - (except when the Vikings rolled into town and sacked the occasional monastery)

The Early Middle Ages

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      - In general, the monks ate good, fresh food on a regular basis, had very good medicine, drank well-made wines, slept in warm(ish) beds, etc.
        - It wasn't fancy—by design—but compared to the life of your average peasant, it really wasn't all that bad

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    - **One of the first Medieval monasteries was a *Syrian* one, established in 500 in Ethiopia**
      - Remember—contrary to much modern opinion, Christianity is a *worldwide* religion, *not* just a Mediterranean/European one

The Early Middle Ages

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    - Benedict of Nursia became a monk in 500 and later began his own monasteries in Italy
      - He'd been born the son of a Roman nobleman around 480—just as Rome fell for the last time
        - So around 500, he wandered into the unincorporated areas outside of Rome to live a more solitary life (not the life of a hermit, but more of a simple, rural life)
      - But eventually, a local monk encouraged him to try hermitic life, which he did for three years
        - At the end of that time, he was so renowned for his holiness that a local monastery asked him to be their new abbot
        - Within a few years, they tried to poison him to get rid of him... *twice*...

The Early Middle Ages

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    - **To call the Rule of Benedict "strict" is putting it mildly**
      - He broke monks down into three types:
        1) Cenobites
           - monks who were part of a monastic order and subject to their abbot

The Early Middle Ages

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      - He broke monks down into three types:
        1) Cenobites
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           - monks who lived the lives of a hermit
             - (Benedict considered this to be cleansing for a time, but selfish to continue indefinitely)

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      - He broke monks down into three types:
        1) Cenobites
        2) Anchorites
        3) Sarabaites
          - monks who lived alone or in small groups, following no definite rule
            - (Benedict considered these guys reprehensible, since they were "independent contractors" selling their wares to get along)

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      2) Anchorites
      3) Sarabaites
      4) Gyrovagi
        - monks who wandered from town to town, monastery to monastery, relying on charity and hospitality
          - (Benedict considered these guys *worse* than reprehensible, since they seemed undisciplined and unproductive, and lived off of others instead of off of the fruit of their own work)

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      - He broke monks down into three types
      - **So, since *every* monk should aspire to be a Cenobite, living in a monastic *community*...**
        - **There should be complete, "unhesitating," prompt, humble, and absolute obedience to the abbot—who is chosen by God**
        - **Speech should be used sparingly, since it is an act of the personal will, and all acts of the will are—at their core—sinful**
          - **Thus, absolute submission at all times is the route to finding absolution of sin**
          - **So 1) Don't speak until spoken to**
            2) Don't laugh
            3) Speak simply and modestly

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        - Speech should be used sparingly, since it is an act of the personal will, and all acts of the will are—at their core—sinful
      - **Everything should be done gravely, somberly, and without levity, since all work is to be done to the Lord and not for ourselves or for our enjoyment**
        - **For instance, there should be no talking during meals**

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      - **So, since *every* monk should aspire to be a Cenobite, living in a monastic *community*...**
        - Everyone must help with the workload in the fields, the kitchen, the infirmary, etc.
        - **Punishments for wrong behavior must be severe**
          - Being late to meals or prayers requires that the monk be separated from all of the other monks for that time and eat or pray alone
          - Messing up a reading or memorized chunk of Scripture requires being publicly beaten, since the monk is mis-speaking the very Word of God

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        - Punishments for wrong behavior must be severe
        - **It is an affront to the abbot—and thus, to God—to attempt to defend a brother monk accused of any wrong behavior**
          - **If any monk is *accused* of wrong behavior, then he is obviously *guilty* of wrong behavior**

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        - It is an affront to the abbot—and thus, to God—to attempt to defend a brother monk accused of any wrong behavior
      - After a twelve-month service as a novitiate in a monastery, a monk may be accepted into the order—and then the appointment is for *life*, on pain of excommunication

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        - The day is divided into 8 canonical hours:
          - *Prime*—6:00 am
          - *Terce*—9:00 am
          - *Sext*—12:00 noon (and lunch)
          - *None*—3:00 pm
          - *Vespers*—6:00 pm (and dinner)
          - *Compline*—9:00 pm (and bedtime)
          - *Matins*—12:00 midnight
          - *Lauds*—3:00 am
            - (Remember, you can't be late to *any* of these, or mess up when reading Scripture in the dark)

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  - To call the Rule of Benedict "strict" is putting it mildly
  - The Rule of Benedict became the model for every monastic order that came after it
    - Even the ones that tweaked it and departed from it nonetheless used it as a springboard for their own orders (such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans)
    - In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI said,
      - "Benedict, with his life and his work, had a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture…" and was a "luminous star that pointed the way out of the black night of history…"
    - Then again, he *is* Pope <u>*Benedict*</u> XVI…

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  515±   A monk named Brendan took a trip
    - Bréanainn of Clonfert, in Ireland, was a simple abbot, but he talked with another monk who had claimed to have visited Paradise on an island to the far West
      - So sometime between 512 and 530, Brendan got 14 other monks to join him in a 7-year voyage westward across the Atlantic
        - According to the old accounts, on this voyage, he encountered various islands, sea serpents, new races, new flora and fauna, and even *Judas*, sitting on a rock
      - It's all very fanciful and it reads a bit like an old Norse saga, wrapped in a very heavy-handed sermon—but it's telling that the hero of this saga is *not* a great *warrior*, but a *Christian monk*

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    - And maybe it's not *entirely* made-up, either
      - There's evidence to suggest a European presence in the New World prior to the Norse and in 1976, British sailor Tim Severin built a boat along Brendan's specs and successfully sailed the 4,500 miles from Ireland to Newfoundland, following Brendan's directions
        - Along the way, he noted multiple things that—with some fanciful blandishments—could have been the places and people described in Brendan's voyage
      - Thus, it's conceivably possible that the first European in America was an Irish monk, travelling in 515 AD

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  - Remember—Irish monks were on the move
    - Not only were they in the process of raiding Europe for manuscripts, but they were also around this time beginning their own missions work to Europe in the process
      - Barring the occasional sending off of someone to get rid of them, the Celtic church in Ireland became the first organized church to officially send out their own missionaries to other cultures

The Early Middle Ages

- Funky little teaching moment—
  - We shouldn't exclude nuns from this discussion as well
    - For instance, around this time in Ireland lived a girl named Brigid, who was renowned for being holy
      - For example, she'd been born into slavery to a Druid priest, but when he tried to feed her, she vomited it back out because even in her infancy, she could recognize holiness and impurity
      - She performed multiple miracles—usually on Easter Sundays—and is a patron saint for the forge, dairy cows, babies, etc.
        - She also had an amusing tendency to give away everything she owned—and everything her father owned, and everything her mother owned—to the poor

The Early Middle Ages

- Funky little teaching moment—
  - We shouldn't exclude nuns from this discussion as well
    - For instance, around this time in Ireland lived a girl named Brigid, who was renowned for being holy
    - Unfortunately, it's all but impossible to figure out what's historical about Brigid, and what has been conflated with stories about the earlier Irish goddess, Brighid
      - For instance, she performed multiple miracles— usually on high holy days—and is the goddess of the forge, dairy cows, babies, etc.
        - The monks just took most of Brighid's old stories and attributed them to the more theologically correct Brigid
      - Again, can you define "syncretism" for me?

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    - After 35 years of the Acacian Schism, the tough, new, former soldier Emperor Justin I called Patriarch John II of Constantinople and Pope Hormisdas of Rome together to make peace
      - They celebrated Easter Sunday together on March 24, 519, and there were never any schisms ever again
        - Okay, there were no other *major* schisms for another 500 years

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  525   Dennis the Dwarf changed history
    - Dionysius Exiguus (AKA Dennis the Dwarf, Dennis the Small, or just Dennis the Humble) was a monk in Scythia Minor—now Bulgaria and Romania in Eastern Europe
      - He was dissatisfied with the existing Julian calendar that had been in use in the Roman Empire since 46 BC, and he didn't like the fact that Eastern churches made use of the "Diocletian Years" ("*anno Diocletiani*")— starting in 284—to describe the "Church Era" (since it meant focusing on the persecutions of a tyrant, rather than on the blessings of the Lord)

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    - Dionysius Exiguus (AKA Dennis the Dwarf, Dennis the Small, or just Dennis the Humble) was a monk in Scythia Minor—now Bulgaria and Romania in Eastern Europe
      - He was dissatisfied with the existing Julian calendar
      - So he developed the concept of years that came *before Christ* (later referred to as "BC") and years that came *after* the *birth* of Christ ("*anno Domini*"—"AD"—or "year of our Lord")
        - He actually did a pretty good job on his calculations—he was only off on the birth of Jesus by 4-6 years

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      - NOTE: many modern scholars now prefer the terms "CE" ("Common Era") and "BCE" ("*Before* the Common Era") to distance the dates from a directly Christian connection
        - But the dates are still *based* on *Dennis'* computation of the birth of Christ...