

FEUDALISM

By the last half of the ninth century, the dreams of a unified Christian Europe died in the disintegration of Charlemagne's Frankish empire, and it became necessary to return to simpler ways to face the societal realities of the age. Two institutions emerged to provide a workable base--feudalism and manorialism.

As a system of government whose outstanding feature was decentralization of political authority among a landed aristocracy, feudalism occupies a position midway between the kinship basis of primitive tribal society and the legal territorial basis of modern civilized society. Its origins lay deep in the European past. In simple terms, feudalism grew out of the merging of practices we have discussed earlier. Personal dependence had its origins in the Germanic *comitatus* and in the Roman clientage, both of which involved a pledge on the part of one individual to serve another in return for some kind of reward. Land became the reward for service in the late Roman Empire in the practice of *beneficium*, whereby owners of *latifundia*, unable to manage their extensive and expanding holdings, granted portions of their large tracts to other people in exchange for particular services.

Feudal institutions had begun to develop when the central government of the Roman Empire could no longer offer adequate protection to its people. During the Merovingian period in the Frankish territory, these feudal institutions had continued to grow and reached their climax in the confusion attending the collapse of the Carolingian Empire. As the Carolingian kings lost their power, they were forced to grant privileges of immunity to great landholders. In 847 the rulers issued a law ordering every freeman to place himself under the protection of a lord--to become a vassal as a means of ensuring faithful service. (In the eighth century the shift from infantry to cavalry and the resultant cost of horses and heavy armor also made kings, and later the lords, dependent on warriors who could equip themselves.)

Thus feudalism became a system of rights and duties, and land became the currency of the feudal contract. This contract between lord and vassal was affirmed in the act of homage. The vassal, kneeling before his lord, declared himself willing to become his "man," and swore an oath of fealty, binding himself to live up to his obligations to his lord. The lord, in turn (in the act of investiture), gave his vassal some object, such as a banner or a ring, which symbolized the granting of a piece of land, a fief, to the vassal. Thus, by these acts, two individuals bound themselves together and agreed to certain duties and received certain rights. The lord's obligations usually included protection of the vassal, giving him justice at the feudal court and refraining from injuring his vassal's honor. The vassal's obligation included military service (usually forty days a year), assistance to the lord in his court, contributions of "aids" or "reliefs" (money payments for specified events; an heir, for instance, had to pay an inheritance tax), and hospitality (entertainment of the lord and his party).

The feudal system produced and maintained distinct classes in the society. In the Frankish territory the king, who owned all the lands in his dominion, was at the top of the hierarchy. He granted some of his land as fiefs, usually to counts or dukes. They, in turn, parceled out land to lesser nobles, the lowest of whom were the knights (this process of subdivision was called subinfeudation). The Church also had large holdings (estimated as high as one-third of the land) and had certain obligations when they accepted fiefs, a situation which often led to serious difficulties between secular lords and the papacy. The clergy was a separate class. In the lowest class were the peasants--freemen and serfs (called villeins in England)--who were worlds apart socially and politically from the nobility.

While the feudal system established the relations between fief holders and their lords, the manorial system determined the relations between fief holders and their tenants. The goal of the manor was self-sufficiency. The typical manor was an estate of considerable size, requiring as it did arable land for raising crops, meadowland for hay and pasture, woodland for fuel and building material, and a natural water supply. One-third to one-half of the tillable soil was reserved as a domain for the lord's support (the *demesne*); the rest was divided into small strips for the peasants. The other lands were held in common. At the manor's center was a village containing a manor house, peasant huts, a church, granaries, a mill, bakery, and other necessary buildings.

Farming techniques on the manor were crude. Much of the work had to be performed by hand, since oxen were usually communally owned and were used only for heavy jobs. A three-field system was employed over much of Europe. One strip was left fallow each year, and the crops were rotated. Most manufactured goods also had to be made on the manor. Women, including the ladies of nobility, were skilled in making clothing, preserving food, and many other tasks.

Each manor had its own governmental institutions--a court, laws, and a police force--but the lord was master of the manor, with power to judge, to punish, and to exact what he wished from his peasant-subjects. If the lord lived elsewhere, he entrusted the management to stewards and bailiffs. The peasants' obligations were many. There was the *corvee* (the obligation to perform labor on the lord's land, usually three days a week) and the *taille* (a primitive type of taxation in which the peasants were required to give certain produce to the lord) as well as *banalities* (fees required for use of the mills, ovens, wine presses--all monopolies belonging to the lord) and tithes to the church.

Feudalism and manorialism were institutions suited to a backward, limited, crude society. But they brought some order out of the chaos into which Europe had fallen. In the last analysis, wars, brigandage, and economic anarchy served to create a society of hawks and rabbits.

BYZANTIUM

As we have seen, Byzantium, with its capital at Constantinople, constituted technically the Eastern half of the Roman Empire; and no survey of the early Middle Ages would be complete without a brief summary of events in this area. Indeed, not only did Byzantium serve as a kind of buffer for the West against repeated waves of invaders from the East--thus giving primitive western Europe a chance to revive from the low state to which it had sunk in the period after the fifth century--but it also preserved ancient Greek learning, the fountainhead of Western philosophy, art, and literature. In this latter aspect, especially, the East may be seen as a spring from which the West repeatedly filled its cup. And this in spite of the fact that with the progress of time, Eastern and Western Christendom tended to draw farther and farther apart; so much so that by the tenth century a chasm stood between the two in the essential areas of customs, politics, religions, standards of living, and even languages. It is fair to say that in this disparity Europe stood as a poor and backward country cousin when compared to the urbane and sophisticated East.

The government of Byzantium was similar to that of Rome after the time of Diocletian, except that it was even more despotic and theocratic. The emperor was an absolute sovereign with unlimited power over every aspect of national life. In this position he was served by an army of clerks, inspectors, and spies who made up an efficient and highly trained bureaucracy.

The Near East suffered no decay of industry and commerce like that undergone in the West. On the contrary, the economy was thriving and was as strictly regulated as in Hellenistic Egypt; state monopolies meant full state coffers, and state planning assured stability and order. As a result of this economic prosperity, social conditions presented a marked contrast with western Europe. In contrast to the primitive levels of culture in France and Italy, Byzantine society continued to maintain its luxurious character, and life was good--at least for the upper classes. The rich lived in elegance and ease, and a large part of the nation's industrial activity was absorbed in the production of articles of luxury to meet the demands of the wealthier classes.

The lot of the lower classes was mean by comparison, even though the common man in Byzantium was probably better off than his counterparts in other areas of Christendom. The agricultural regime divided most of the land into great estates operated by feudal magnates, and the population was made up almost entirely of tenant farmers and serfs. In the fifth century the Emperor Anastasius forbade all peasants who had lived on a particular farm for thirty years ever to remove themselves. In effect, the peasant was bound to the land, thus ensuring a basic minimum of agricultural production. Urban workers found employment in the extensive commercial and industrial activities. As oppressive as it was, the situation bears favorable comparison with the distress, starvation, and anarchy endured by the Western agrarian.

Like all Byzantine emperors, Justinian was considered the king of kings and the vice regent of God. At his accession the empire consisted of the Balkan peninsula, Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, and Armenia. Justinian made a persistent attempt to reconquer the lost Western areas of the old empire. During his reign (527-565) the armies of Byzantium reconquered North Africa from the Vandals, Italy from the Ostrogoths, and southern Spain from the Visigoths. These wars were long and costly, and the attention paid to the West allowed the Persians to advance on Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria. In 540 the Persians sacked Antioch, in Syria. The reasons for conflict were partly political, partly economic--the old problem of "spheres of influence." Military activity brought Justinian's empire close to the brink of economic collapse.

In the sphere of legislation, Justinian's activities are more laudable. The edicts, pronouncements, and activities of his predecessors had fallen into disorder, and Justinian's greatest accomplishment rested on his codification of the various collections of Roman law--the Code of Justinian. The code provided legal sanction for a highly centralized and absolutist form of government and provided an instrument to safeguard such basic rights as contract, inheritance, and the security of women and children.

Justinian claimed that as emperor he was the religious as well as the political head of the state. In essence, the Church was a department of the state, and the patriarch was appointed by the emperor and responsible to him. The East did not recognize Rome as the center of the Church, but acknowledged Constantinople as the second see of Christendom. Thus began the schism between the West and the East, and the development of the Greek Orthodox Church with its center in Constantinople.

Following the death of Justinian, the empire was faced with desperate military and diplomatic struggles from two directions--the southeast and the north. In 568 the Lombards invaded Italy and seized a considerable portion of it. Later in the century the Sassanids seized Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and advanced through Asia Minor to Constantinople. At the same time the Avars, a Slavic people from the north, moved into the Balkans toward Constantinople. But the Byzantines were miraculously saved by Heraclius (610-641), who flung back the enemies and weakened both Persians and Avars.

During the next five hundred years the task of administering and defending the empire fell to four remarkable dynasties: the Heraclids, the Isaurian house, the Amorians, and the Macedonians. The next challenge came from the rampant Arabs. During the first half of the seventh century, the Arabs swept away Byzantine power in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa. In 717-718 they had come through Asia Minor and placed Constantinople under siege. The savior appeared in the person of Leo III, the Isaurian, who rescued the capital and eventually succeeded in liberating Asia Minor. By this time the Byzantines had lost much of their territory, but what remained was more homogeneous. Greek had replaced Latin as the official language in the empire. Now the Byzantine Empire was a Hellenized monarchy centered in Constantinople, something quite different from the old Roman state.

Leo III made extensive internal reforms such as bringing the Justinian Code abreast of developments and having it written in Greek, reorganizing the administrative divisions into smaller units, and increasing centralization of government. But when Leo III attempted by edict to forbid image worship and began to destroy religious statues and pictures, riots ensued and a further schism between the Western Church and the Byzantine took place as a result of this Iconoclastic Controversy.

In 867 the Macedonian dynasty came to the throne in the person of Basil I. During this time the Byzantine Empire was threatened by the Bulgar state in the Balkans; however, under the dynamic leadership of Basil II (976-1025), the Byzantine military forces crushed the Bulgarian foes with great severity. On one occasion 15,000 Bulgars were blinded and sent back home (thus Basil's epithet "the Bulgar-slayer"), and the Bulgar kingdom was incorporated into the empire. Basil II was also instrumental in bringing about the conversion of the Russian Grand Prince Vladimir to Christianity and in increasing trade and friendly relations with the Russians. When Basil II died in 1025, the empire entered a period of decline because of internal trouble and the increasing pressure of the Seljuk Turks. While it continued to exist for over four hundred more years, the empire never again regained its strength and importance.

THE RISE OF ISLAM

The Muslim (popularly called Moslem) civilization was a creation of the nomadic inhabitants of the Arabian Desert. In one generation these nomadic desert tribes (called Bedouins) were to be transformed into an international power. The catalyst was a religious prophet, Mohammed, who succeeded in galvanizing the Arab world into unity and jolting it out of its isolation.

Mohammed was born in Mecca in 570, a member of the Quraish tribe. Orphaned as a child, he was brought up by an uncle who became his lifelong friend and supporter. At the age of twenty-five Mohammed married a rich widow named Khadija, for whom he had managed caravans. In the ensuing years, his religious interests matured and his spiritual life deepened; he came to devote one month each year to solitary meditation at Mount Hira. Then, at age forty (on what Muslims call the Night of Power and Glory), he had a religious experience that determined the direction of his future. He reported being confronted by the voice of an angel which said, "O Mohammed! Thou art Allah's messenger." He became convinced that Allah, the one and only God, had commanded him to preach of people's duty to their Creator and to call upon them to repent of their sins.

In the beginning Mohammed had few converts--his wife, his cousin Ali, and a leading merchant, Abu Bakr. The ridicule and scorn of the townspeople gradually turned to hostility, and Mohammed and his followers became the targets of discrimination and persecution. Without honor in his own city, Mohammed was invited by the neighboring Yathrib, a city some

280 miles distant, to provide the leadership that community so sorely needed. In 622 he responded to this request, eluding would-be assassins in his departure from Mecca. This withdrawal to Yathrib is referred to as the Hegira, "the breaking of former ties," and the year 622 is counted as the first in the Muslim calendar.

In Yathrib (now renamed Medina, "the city"), Mohammed was acknowledged as a leader with divine authority in both spiritual and temporal matters. Not only did he reform religious practices, but he created a new state and a new social order that remain the model for all Muslims to this day. Pervading all was the principle of equality, which prevented dangerous class distinctions and ensured equality of all Muslims before the law. His followers accepted Mohammed's judgment and his codes of social, religious, and political conduct. Idolatry, infanticide, usury, gambling, drinking of wine, and eating of pork were all prohibited.

Because Allah was the one God--holy, majestic, almighty, and absolute--he required absolute allegiance, complete submission to his will. Thus the religion was called *Islam*, "submission to God." Islam imposed five duties on its believers: confession of faith, prayer five times a day (facing Mecca), almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Mecca. Those who believed in Allah and obeyed his orders were assured a happy life after death, while the disobedient and wicked were doomed to eternal damnation.

While Allah was the only God, many other figures were recognized. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were acknowledged as prophetic predecessors of Mohammed. To Jesus as prophet was revealed only part of the divine truth, which was more fully revealed to Mohammed. Thus Mohammed remained *the* Prophet, the final authority on any religious matter. Islam also recognized the existence of angels, who were similar to those described in the Bible, and jinn, who were midway between angels and mankind and either good or evil (Satan was the most powerful of the evil jinn).

Mohammed's leadership was extended to foreign as well as domestic relations; he organized an army for Medina and concluded alliances with neighboring peoples. He negotiated a truce with his native city to allow Muslims to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but the truce was broken; whereupon he marched on Mecca and forced his enemies to surrender. His first act was to throw out the 360 idols from the temple (the Kaaba), but it, together with the Black Stone, was preserved as the supreme center of Islam.

Mohammed died in 632, leaving behind a faith which had united Arabia and was to astound the world with its militant expansion. After his death, some of Mohammed's associates compiled a book containing what was recorded or could be recalled of his revelations. This authorized version has remained the official text of the Koran (or Qur'an) to the present day and is believed by the Muslims to contain the actual word of Allah as revealed to Mohammed. Since Allah had chosen to speak to Mohammed in Arabic, and since the Koran was designed particularly to be recited

and heard (Arabic has an unusual force and beauty of sound), it was not to be translated into other languages. Recently, however, translations have been sanctioned on the basis that it is the "meaning" and not the text that is being translated. The Koran remains today the most important book in Islam and the guide to every aspect of Muslim life.

Under the first four caliphs who succeeded Mohammed, close friends and relatives of the Prophet, territorial expansion was rapid, and much of the land held by the Byzantines and Sassanids fell to the Arabs, including Syria, Persia, and the greater part of Egypt. The succeeding Umayyad dynasty (611-750) continued the expansion across North Africa and Gibraltar (and moved the capital to Damascus). In 711 the Muslims entered Spain and took over the Visigoth kingdom but were turned back the next year at the Battle of Tours in France. They also gained territory as far east as Turkey and the Indus Valley. In 750 the Persians and non-Arabs gained control, the Abbasid dynasty capturing and ruling from the city of Baghdad until 1258. During this dynasty Islamic power and civilization reached its height; trade was carried on between various parts of the Muslim Empire and with other parts of the world. The reign of Harun-al-Rashid, a contemporary of Charlemagne, was marked by great wealth and splendor in the court and in the city of Baghdad.

"Feudalism," "Islam"

R.E.J., 1974

All other material

P.J.B., 1976

FOR FURTHER READING

Chambers, M. H. *The Fall of Rome*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963.

Dawson, C. *The Making of Europe*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1956.

Lot, F. *The End of the Ancient World and the Beginnings of the Middle Ages*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Torch Books, 1961.

Rostovtzeff, Mikhail. *Rome*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Southern, R. W. *The Making of the Middle Ages*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

Vryonis, S. *Byzantium and Europe*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967.

PHILOSOPHY - RELIGION

As early as the second century A.D. there was present a difference between Eastern and Western Christianity concerning freedom of the will. The Greek theologians had held to the freedom of the human will by which people could turn themselves from sin to God. The Western Church tended to stress rather the depravity of human beings and the need for grace to enable them to turn to God. This difference became a serious issue in the West in the fifth century in the famous Pelagian controversy, which focused on the issue between Augustine and Pelagius. Let us look first at the views of Augustine, who represented the orthodox position.

Augustine, a bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was born in 354 and died in 430. He was one of the great seminal minds of Christian philosophical history and serves to summarize and draw to a close the first four hundred years of Christian thought. He also set the Christian view until the time of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. His two most famous works are the *Confessions* and *The City of God*.

At the age of nineteen he joined the Manichaeans, an Oriental mystery cult originating in Persia, which held a dualism of matter and spirit. In disagreement with them over their view that sin lies in the nature of matter rather than in the will, he turned next to Neo-Platonism (Plotinus), which held that only the good has genuine reality while evil is but the absence of good. He was finally converted to Christianity under the preaching of Ambrose of Milan and the reading of the Epistles of Paul, leading to a great inner moral struggle and a mystic experience in which he claimed to have heard the voice of God say to him, "Take up and read," and on turning to the scriptures, he read in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof."

The views of Augustine may be summed up in the following points:

1. He began with the axiom that all good is either God or from God. Adam's goodness, therefore, was a natural perfection which involved his possessing the divine image in his righteousness and wisdom and immortality, but which lacked the divine perfection because it was conditional and relative; i.e., Adam was capable of sinning while God was not. Part of humanity's original perfection was the gift of divine grace by which it was able to persevere in goodness.

2. All of this Adam lost in the fall when he chose to exercise his freedom in love of himself and his appetites rather than in love and obedience to God.

3. This "fallen" state of Adam, according to Augustine, became the natural inheritance through conception and birth of each child because "mankind" is one reality. In Platonic and Aristotelian terms we would have said one "form," so that the eternal form of mankind became fallen, corrupt. But Augustine does not seem to have pushed it that far. Rather he stressed the existential idea that in all human generation there is an act of self-seeking satisfaction of bodily appetite that is the essence of the original sin.

4. The grace of God alone can save people from this state of radical depravity, but while they are "fallen" and "depraved," the "image of God" in them is not totally lost or destroyed. It remains in a person in reason and in some degree in the person's will. People are not free to will the good, however, but only to sin; and human beings are, therefore, totally incapable of the good, and hence "good works" are not really good at all and hence have no saving efficacy. Thus, also, the divine grace is made the only possible source of salvation for human beings. Divine grace, furthermore, is not a personal spiritual relation but an act of God within people which restores their ability to will what is good.

For Augustine, faith is the first step in this "act of God within" and is possible by people because it is belief as a function of the image of God in human beings in their reason. Through reason people come to believe in the revealed word of God, which leads to knowledge of the love of God in the revelation and, in turn, prompts love for God. Together these lead to a desire for the renewing grace of God, which "infuses" a new power to the will to do the good God commands.

5. Yet in all this Augustine wanted not to deny people's free will, which is very hard to reconcile with the rest of his views. He seems to have believed somehow that no person believes, has faith, unless he wills it, and yet also to believe that only an act of God within a person, not his own act, can create the will to do the good. He seems to have believed somehow that the act of believing in God and the revelation is the act of people as an act of the surviving, though marred, image of God in reason, and therefore within people's capabilities, and yet also to have believed that if God does not predestine any particular individual to salvation nothing the individual can do can make any difference. He also believed that if an individual does not will to believe, nevertheless, if God chooses to save the individual, then God's grace is irresistible; that is, the individual is saved even if he wills to the contrary. It seems to amount to saying that the will of people is free to believe or not to believe, but God does as he pleases independent of what people believe. If God wills to save an individual, then God's grace is irresistible even if the individual struggles against it. By the same principle of the sovereignty of the will of God, if God wills an individual to be the object of his just wrath on the person's sin, that, too, is irresistible. Some individuals by being predetermined by God to be saved must demonstrate the grace of God, while some individuals being predetermined by God not to be saved must demonstrate the justice of God. Thus people can never know until the judgment whether they have been predestined to be saved or lost.

It is interesting to observe how this determinism of human behavior, which we met first in the atomic materialists such as Aristippus, Democritus, and Lucretius, who claimed that all human action is predetermined by mechanical motions of the atoms of our bodies and brains, shows up now in Christianity, where the spirituality of God and mankind is taken for granted, and mankind is predetermined to sin by a spiritual corruption of the human seed from the "first man," and God is the determiner in his predestination of individuals to salvation or damnation. It shows up again in modern life where we hold in the twentieth century that people are determined by their heredity and more especially by their environment.

It was into this predominating climate of opinion that Pelagius came. He was a British monk in Rome who preached a strongly moralistic Christianity, stressing the perfectly normal, straightforward, common-sense view of the freedom of the will, human responsibility, and repentance. Thus he held that a person, by his own will, is able to do all that God commands, or God would not command him to do what is good. He taught that human beings are born "neutral"--not corrupt by nature nor by inheritance. Thus there is, he thought, no original sin inherited through natural conception from Adam, because sin is not a fault of nature but of the will. He further held that each soul is a separate creation of God and hence free from sin and not capable of inheriting sin. Baptism, therefore, he said, has no function of removing any sin in infants but only of admitting them into the family and body of Christ. Baptism, however, has efficacy in removing past sins of adults. Thus the grace of God for Pelagius is not absolutely necessary for salvation but relatively so in aiding people to a resolute will against sin. To Pelagius, divine grace is imparted to people primarily by the endowments of reason and free will. Thus Christ becomes only an example, a teacher, and Lord.

The conflict between Augustine and Pelagius is obvious. In a synod in Carthage in A.D. 412, Coelestius, a disciple of Pelagius, was excommunicated, and in 432 the Council of Ephesus in the East ruled against Pelagius.

Augustine's view that reason is the image of God in human beings left him free to argue from the certainties of reason that God exists. The argument followed the same general pattern set by Plato and Aristotle that there must be a first and uncaused cause, a necessary and unchangeable being.

God, he taught, is also revealed in the person of his Son, in whom, as the Logos, he conceives the world of Platonic Ideas, which served as a pattern for the created world and by which the world was created. These universal Ideas are intelligible, beautiful, and good, and can be known by reason, which is the image of God in mankind. The Ideas did not fashion the world out of pre-existent matter as Plato taught, nor was the world an emanation as Plotinus taught; the world was created *ex nihilo*--out of nothing--by the fiat act of the will of God.

The proof of the existence of the soul, Augustine claimed, is in the existence of thought, which is the function of the soul, which is spiritual