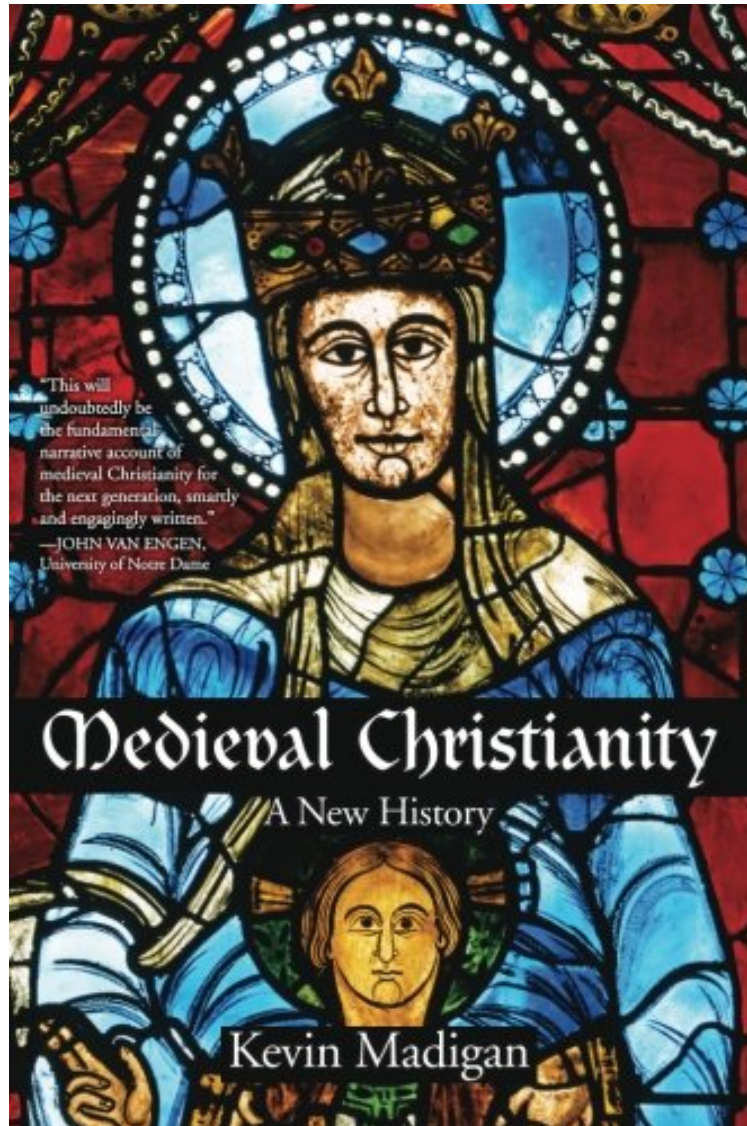


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Medieval Christianity: A New History

Kevin Madigan

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Kevin Madigan : Medieval Christianity: A New History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Medieval Christianity: A New History:

84 of 85 people found the following review helpful. A Must Read on the Medieval Church By Dr. Terrence McGarty Medieval Christianity is a very readable and comprehensive book covering Western Europe from about 500 AD until 1400 AD, albeit edging down to 150 and up to 1500 at its extreme. The book is well balanced, well researched and accessible to all readers. The title also states it as A New History but just what is new and well known

is not as clear perhaps as the author may have desired. Notwithstanding, what the author has presented is useful for the newly informed as well as the well informed. The author starts with a brief discussion of early Christianity from 150 to 600. This has as its center piece Augustine and his writings. One of the most difficult problems with early Christianity is the complexity of Greek thought and the Eastern Church and the slow evolution of a Western Church. Southern has examined this in detail and it is the complexity of Eastern thought which in many ways was a departing point for the west and it was its abandonment by Augustine via his Roman way of thinking that opened the Western Church and what we now think of Medieval Christianity. Augustine introduced many ideas in a manner that reformed Western beliefs. His battle with Pelagius is clearly one and his emphasis on grace another. There is an interesting discussion on pp 29-30 on when this stage of early Christianity ended. One way to pinpoint this change perhaps is the time of Gregory I. The reason is that at this time Gregory breached with Byzantium by severing with the ruler in Ravenna and taking both religious and political control in Rome. The author's discussion on Gregory is very limited in scope and here I would fault the author for an opportunity to use this figure as a major break point for the establishment of the Western Church (see pp 45-62). It can be argued that it was Gregory who de facto created Medieval Christianity. The Bishop of Rome in 600 was still just that, the Bishop of Rome. The Emperor in Constantinople was a de facto head of the Church, calling various Councils to discuss major religious issues. Gregory had been in the court in Constantinople, had been Mayor of Rome, had come from an old line Roman family and desired to be a monk along the lines of Benedict. However he was drawn to the Bishop of Rome slot by the people of Rome who required his leadership. Also Gregory was looking westward, seeing Constantinople as an aging confluence of political intrigue. Thus by looking west his communications with the Merovingian queen Brunhilda is a classic example of Rome becoming *pari passu* with leaders and influencing them via religion and charm. On the other hand the likes of Brunhilda were brutal to the point of savagery and Gregory seems in his writing to have avoided discussion of these facts. Likewise he dealt with the Lombards as well as sending the Italian Bishop Augustine to England. This latter act however can be viewed as an affront to the Irish who were still adhering to the Eastern Church ways and saw Gregory as an equal in debate. In essence Gregory set up the conflict between Ireland and England. But it was Gregory and his looking westward rather than Eastward that made for the seminal start of the Medieval Church. In this section it would have been useful to explore in some detail the lengthy discussions between Columbanus and Gregory I. There was but a brief mention on p 48 of Columbanus. First the Latin of Columbanus, the Irish monk, was dramatically different from Gregory. Gregory had evolved to almost a koine type Latin while Columbanus seems to have retained almost Ciceronian Latin. The Irish monks had learned Latin almost independently from Rome based upon classic texts and this in a way strongly influenced their style. In addition Columbanus and all the Irish monks had never been under the Roman yoke and thus in dealing with Rome they dealt with them as almost an independent thinker. Chapter 4 introduces Charlemagne. Charlemagne was a follow on to the Merovingians, albeit the descendent of a Merovingian court official. Charlemagne in 800 gets coroneted by the Bishop of Rome, now viewed as both a religious figure and putative political player. Chapter 5 deals with the parochial life. There was a local parish alongside the monastic monasteries. The local priests were typically less well educated than the monks who spent much of their time reading and writing. In contrast the local parish priest was dealing with local matters of lesser import. Chapter 6 deals with the Jews, an issue always made complex, especially in the West. Chapter 7 considers the Crusades and Islam. A great deal has been written on crusades and this presentation is brief. The complexity of the expansion and acceptance of Muslim beliefs was often seen by the Christians as another heretic sect, especially their belief in polygamy. There did not seem to be any attempt to understand their thought throughout this period. Starting in Chapter 8 the author moves to what he calls the era of High Medieval Christianity. This is from 1050 through 1300. There is a discussion of the reforms to what had become a Church with many small faults, and this included Rome itself. By this time Rome had clearly become a Papacy in terms of its singular position. Chapter 10 discusses some of the heretical movements during this early period of the High Medieval Church. Chapters 11 and 12 present the Dominicans and the Franciscans respectively. Whereas the Dominicans were always positioned as intellectually elite, Aquinas was a Dominican, the Franciscans presented a possible threat to Rome, and they advocated a return to early Christian belief of poverty. However Rome managed them quite well and the net result was a Franciscan order that was on a par with the Dominicans and in a sense often superior. One needs look no further than Ockham and his Franciscan followers. The author then details many of the elements of religious life and affairs. At this time the Church was becoming a dominant part of the lives of the people. On pp 262-266 the author presents Abelard and Heloise. This is one of the classic tales of this time. This is one of the best descriptions and one in context that I have seen. This alone is worth reading. On pp 277-283 there is a brief discussion on Aquinas. I would have liked to see a more detailed presentation. Aquinas became a figure of the Aristotelian movement and after his death his works were banned by some but they came back in the 19th century and the basis of Church belief and doctrine. Some more detailed discussion of his work would have been useful. I felt his presentation was too brief in passing. As noted, the author discusses Aquinas but fails to discuss Ockham, the Franciscan, albeit a brief note on the next to last page ((p434). Ockham was a nominalist, one who denied universals, and thus in contradistinction to Aquinas. Ockham also reinvigorated the idea of the Individual and as such was a catalyst for many works emanating from his. Also Ockham demonstrated confrontational intellectual opposition to the

Avignon Popes resulting in his fleeing eastward and being supported by German Princes. Here is an example of quasi-national opposition to the non-Roman Pope, a conflict that was just starting to brew. Late Medieval Christianity occurs from 1350 to 1500 and the author does a good job in details the key points. Again there are heretical movements such as Hus and Wyclif and the Lollards. He discusses the changes and discusses Prague in some detail. Prague was a cauldron of religious dissent, as the statue to Hus demonstrates in the square of present day Prague, a statue I passed daily on my way to my office, ironically across from the house of Kafka! Understanding central Europe more would have been helpful in explaining this effect. The Avignon papacy from 1309-1378 (pp 374-378) blends Middle and High Medieval Christianity and represents a clear distortion of the Bishop of Rome and the attempted, and in many ways total, control by the French throne over the Pope. Here we have most likely the first instance of having a Pope as a separate entity from the Bishop of Rome. For centuries before this, when the Pope qua leader of the Church was mentioned, the position was synonymous with the Bishop of Rome. In fact the true title should be Bishop of Rome, since that is the position of such a leader. It would have been helpful to have an expanded discussion on this topic. This period of fighting Popes has in my opinion left an indelible scar on the Western Church. Overall this is a superb book and worth reading and rereading. The author builds upon Southern and his work as he indicates. However there are many other views of the issue he presents and space being limited his presentation is fair, well balanced, and exceptionally readable. In contrast one might also read, if available, the works of Henri Daniel-Rops (a pseudonym for Henri Tetiot) who albeit an apologist for the Church, has added insight on many of these issues discussed by the author. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. pay attention to the newer scholarship for each period and topic -- and so is quite a good summary for someone unfamiliar with tBy linnea s. turner This is more a summary textbook than a real in-depth study. It does, however, pay attention to the newer scholarship for each period and topic -- and so is quite a good summary for someone unfamiliar with the periods covered. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Easy to read By ngrader Very balanced presentation of disputes and their meaning to each party. Gave some points never encountered in previous reading. Easy to read, good type. Will retread in future.

An expansive guide to the medieval world, with new attention to women, ordinary parishioners, attitudes toward Jews and Muslims, and more For many, the medieval world seems dark and foreign an often brutal and seemingly irrational time of superstition, miracles, and strange relics. The aggressive pursuit of heretics and attempts to control the Holy Land might come to mind. Yet the medieval world produced much that is part of our world today, including universities, the passion for Roman architecture and the development of the gothic style, pilgrimage, the emergence of capitalism, and female saints. This new narrative history of medieval Christianity, spanning the period 500 to 1500 CE, attempts to integrate what is familiar to readers with new themes and narratives. Elements of novelty in the book include a steady focus on the role of women in Christianity; the relationships among Christians, Jews, and Muslims; the experience of ordinary parishioners; the adventure of asceticism, devotion, and worship; and instruction through drama, architecture, and art. Madigan expertly integrates these areas of focus with more traditional themes, such as the evolution and decline of papal power; the nature and repression of heresy; sanctity and pilgrimage; the conciliar movement; and the break between the old Western church and its reformers. Illustrated with more than forty photographs of physical remains, this book promises to become an essential guide to a historical era of profound influence.

"Accessible and clear . . . an engaging narrative history that should please experts while whetting the appetites of beginners." Publishers Weekly (starred review)