



Speaker: The shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance was a gradual one. As it is with any shift from one era to another, it is difficult to tell when one starts and one ends. The Middle Ages were characterized by an intense religiosity.

When the Roman Empire disintegrated, the fabric of civilization literally pulled apart at the seams. The Christian church emerged out of this tear in the fabric of civilization, as a unifying force in Western Europe.

While a great deal of good came from an organization based on religious principles and an attitude of piety, there were frequent abuses of the power that came in association with Christianity and the church. For example, Clovis, the first Frankish King, consolidated his power by beheading anyone who was not a Christian. That eliminated many of his enemies. History recounts so many mass beheadings by Clovis that the Rhine River ran red.

Additionally, there was a religious viewpoint during the Middle Ages, that life here on earth was a test to be endured with the promise of a better world in the afterlife. This did not create a hopeful and optimistic society. No wonder, famine and plague were everywhere. Entire bastions of civilization, such as Constantinople, were decimated by the black plague. Additionally, the carrying capacity of a land was frequently exceeded. This helped create a state of war that was so persistent that it was rarely interrupted by piece.

If you liked war, the middle ages would be a fabulous time to live in Europe. You could fight off the Visigoths and the Vandals, and after you were done with that, you could take on the Vikings. Wait, there's more. For several hundred years, you had the opportunity to go to exotic lands like Constantinople, Jerusalem, Tripoli, Cyprus, and Tunis as part of the Crusades and fight the Muslims and Jews.

Additionally, you could learn from the great civilizations that the Arabs had created, which were significantly more advanced in many areas of culture than what was present in Western Europe at the time.

Then there was a feudal system, which meant that opportunities for economic advancement were almost nonexistent. Generally, most people were peasants. This did make life very simple, in fact, extremely simple for most folks. This led to great disparities between wealth and poverty.

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