

than a foot on the bureaucratic ladder, as the main path to advancement for most secular elites, even in areas where Roman landowners survived 476 and a southern Gallic model prevailed. As a result, an expensive literary education ceased to be a necessity. The descendants of both Roman and immigrant elites in fact continued to revere the old traditions. The odd Frankish and Visigothic king has gone down in the cultural annals for his Latin poetry. When a 'proper' Latin poet called Venantius Fortunatus turned up at court from Italy, he delighted equally both Roman- and Frankish-descended grandees present. This individual made a career out of singing for his supper, his party piece being elegant couplets in praise of the dessert. Despite this, neither kind of grandee bothered any more with a full Latin education. They did teach their children to read and write, but their aims were more limited. As a result, by about 600, writing was confined to clerics, while secular elites tended to be content just to be able to read, especially their Bibles; they no longer saw writing as an essential part of their identity. It was the Roman state which, again not very deliberately, had created and maintained the context in which widespread secular literacy was an essential component of elegance, and with the passing of that state, new patterns of literacy evolved.<sup>12</sup>

A similar point can be made about Christianity.\* The Christianization of first the Mediterranean world, then of the broader reaches of central, eastern and northern Europe in the first millennium, is sometimes seen as a transformation entirely unaffected by the collapse of Rome. There is some truth to this notion, but it can also mislead. The Christian religion has always evolved, certainly institutionally, according to contemporary contexts. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Romanization of Christianity\* was as important an historical phenomenon as the Christianization of the Empire. Thanks to the emperor Constantine and his successors, imperial funding of meetings of Christian leaders were able to define most of the religion's doctrines from the early fourth century onwards. The Church also developed a very particular hierarchy of bishops, archbishops and patriarchs whose geographical locations largely reflected the Empire's administrative structure of local and regional capitals. Nor did Christian Roman emperors step back one iota from the claim made by their pagan predecessors that they had been appointed by the Divinity - they simply re-identified that Divinity as the Christian God. So they had

The point is:  
\* Rome made Christianity a permanent powerful institution, but also made it rigid, bureaucratic & hierarchical.

↓ Spread of Christianity. <sup>from:</sup> Heather, Peter. Fall of the Roman Empire. 2000

Assignment:

Pick out the author's thesis & a couple sub points he uses to back it up.

every right, as they saw it, to involve themselves in the operation of the Church at all levels. And they duly did so, calling councils, making laws, and interfering in senior appointments.

Christianity as it evolved within the structures of the Empire was thus very different from what it had been before Constantine's conversion, and the disappearance of the Roman state profoundly changed it yet again. For one thing, the boundaries of the new kingdoms failed in some cases to respect the hierarchies of late Roman administration. Bishops thus sometimes found themselves in one kingdom, and their archbishops in another. ~~Successive archbishops of Arles, which was part of the Visigothic kingdom but whose metropolitan control extended into the Burgundian, fell foul of their kings who, suspicious of their cross-border contacts, removed them from their posts.~~ There was change, too, of an intellectual kind. In the Roman world, leading laymen – who were as well if not better educated than the clergy – often contributed to religious debate. But with the disappearance of widespread literacy, laymen soon ceased to be able to do so, and the intellectual world of the early medieval Church became a solidly clerical one. This would not have happened, had laymen remained as educated as clerics. Equally important, post-Roman kings inherited from their predecessors the claim to religious authority, and took it upon themselves to appoint bishops and call councils. As a result, Christianity operated at this time in what Peter Brown has called 'Christian microcosms'. There was no single, unified Church; rather, the boundaries of post-Roman kingdoms defined working regional subgroupings, and these Church communities within the different kingdoms had relatively little to do with one another.<sup>13</sup>

Above all, the rise of the medieval papacy as an overarching authority for the whole of western Christendom is inconceivable without the collapse of the Roman Empire. In the Middle Ages, popes came to play many of the roles within the Church that Christian Roman emperors had appropriated to themselves – making laws, calling councils, making or influencing important appointments. Had western emperors of the Roman type still existed, it is inconceivable that popes would have been able to carve out for themselves a position of such independence. In the east, where emperors still ruled, successive Patriarchs of Constantinople, whose legal and administrative position was modelled on that of the Roman papacy, found it impossible to act other than as imperial yes-men. Appointed by the emperors at will, they tended to be ex imperial ~~men~~ bureaucrats highly receptive to imperial orders.

\*it was more like a semi-powerful sect before.