

Each of the five HalifaxThinks courses on the West is designed to be self-standing. They can be taken in any order. There is a link below to a free sample lecture which happens to be both the Introductory lecture to the Medieval World **and** a summary of the Ancient World. Feel free to look it over or download it.

We will start the course proper with a double lecture on i) the earliest account of Jesus (in the *Gospel of Mark*) and then another ii) on the amazing story of how his followers settled the question of who and what he was (the result of this three- century long debate is enshrined in the *Nicene Creed*).

The next lecture deals with the astounding story of the foundation of monasticism from its origins in the *Desert Fathers* of Egypt - showing its continuing appeal and importance right up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Then we turn to read Augustine's *Confessions*. He was the principal person who shaped the Medieval Era in the Latin-speaking Western half of Christendom. In this immensely influential book he set out what it meant to be a Christian from the standpoint of the individual soul. This turned out to be something that had not been seen nor was possible at any earlier time or place.

Our next reading (and lecture) is on the quintessential Christian Epic which was the early French *chanson de geste* (a "song of deeds") known as the *Song Of Roland*. It is about the character of the hero who, as the right-hand man of Charlemagne, brought Europe out of the Dark Ages even as he seemed to be doing the opposite.

The following two lectures (on Neo-Platonism and Islam and on Scholasticism and the Gothic) pivot around many short readings in the text of the lectures as well as Abelard's *History of My Calamities*. The lectures cover much of the amazing intellectual, literary, artistic, architectural and historical turmoil of the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in which the Judaism, Christianity and Islam all developed in relation to one another and to their different versions of the secular world.

We end with three lectures on Dante's incomparable *Divine Comedy* – Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. In these great cantos Dante sums up all world history to 1300 AD (the fictional date of Dante's weekend long excursion). They capture the achievements of the Medieval period and also account for its failure and imminent collapse. When this happened in the two hundred years between 1300 and 1500 – often spoken of as the Waning of the Middle Ages – this made way for the Modern Era (at the end of which we now find ourselves). The Middle Ages is the connection between Antiquity and Modernity enlightening both our future and our past.

If any of this seems interesting to you please join in our conversation and shared reading of these great texts.