

7.51 Christian Missionaries and the Spread of Catholicism in Europe

Christianity in the middle ages honored the concept of **pilgrimage**. The most popular destination for pilgrimage was the Holy Land but the dangers of travelling during the Middle Ages confined people to local pilgrimage sites.

Missionary activity was rife in the early days of Christianity in the medieval era. Many who sought to dedicate their lives to the Church went to study, live and work in the **monasteries**. The monks were **zealous** about their faith and spread it with equal enthusiasm. Ulfilas was one of the earliest missionaries to spread the Christian Gospel. He spent more than 30 years ministering to the Visigoths tribes of the Middle Ages and helped to translate the Bible into Gothic.

Ulfilas and the early Christian missionaries were disciples of Arius, thus most of the Germanic society except the Anglo- Saxon and the Franks adopted the Arian version of Christianity. This prompted the Franks to adopt Roman Catholicism, leading to the strong relationship between the **papacy** and Frankish rulers.

In the Middle Ages the Church was not only influential in political matters but was also a source of knowledge. In England, Irish monasteries served as a reliable place for seeking education. The peasants often sent their children to the schools established by the Church. Even though the education was **meager**, it allowed the selected students to pursue studies in religion, philosophy and Latin at the monasteries or in universities.

The modern universities of the West originated from the middle ages Christian church. Universities first started as cathedral schools where attending students were categorized as **clerics**. This was beneficial to the students as it offered them **immunity** and protection as they were under the Church's jurisdiction. The cathedral learning centers gradually transformed into independent schools administered separately from the cathedral. The earliest universities to emerge from the medieval church were the University of Paris, the Oxford University and the University of Bologna. The concept of issuing degrees in universities was derived from the Muslim madrasahs established in 9th century.

pilgrimage: a religious journey

missionary: relating to the spread of a religion

monastery: a place where priests or monks live, pray, and learn together

zealous: extremely enthusiastic

papacy: office or authority of the pope

meager: small or lacking

cleric: a priest or religious leader

immunity: legal protection

1. Who was Ulfilas?
2. What groups did missionaries convert to Catholicism?
3. What purposes did monasteries serve?
4. How did universities develop?