



Mysteries of the Middle Ages: The Rise of Feminism, Science, and Art from the Cults of Catholic Europe (Hinges of History)

Thomas Cahill

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After the long period of cultural decline known as the Dark Ages, Europe experienced a rebirth of scholarship, art, literature, philosophy, and science and began to develop a vision of Western society that remains at the heart of Western civilization today.

By placing the image of the Virgin Mary at the center of their churches and their lives, medieval people exalted womanhood to a level unknown in any previous society. For the first time, men began to treat women with dignity and women took up professions that had always been closed to them.

The communion bread, believed to be the body of Jesus, encouraged the formulation of new questions in philosophy: Could reality be so fluid that one substance could be transformed into another? Could ordinary bread become a holy reality? Could mud become gold, as the alchemists believed? These new questions pushed the minds of medieval thinkers toward what would become modern science.

Artists began to ask themselves similar questions. How can we depict human anatomy so that it looks real to the viewer? How can we depict motion in a composition that never moves? How can two dimensions appear to be three? Medieval artists (and writers, too) invented the Western tradition of realism.

On visits to the great cities of Europe—monumental Rome; the intellectually explosive Paris of Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas; the hotbed of scientific study that was Oxford; and the incomparable Florence of Dante and Giotto—Cahill brilliantly captures the spirit of experimentation, the colorful pageantry, and the passionate pursuit of knowledge that built the foundations for the modern world. Bursting with stunning four-color art, MYSTERIES OF THE MIDDLE AGES is the ultimate Christmas gift book.

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