A Brief Primary Reader for Western Civilization

Volume 1

EDITORS: Charles Crouch
Georgia Southern University
Mark Angelos
Manchester College

Bibliobase, A Service of Houghton Mifflin Company

Houghton Mifflin Company • Boston • New York
# Western Civilization, Volume 1

## Table of Contents

### Ancient Near East

- **Chapter 1**  
  *The Epic of Gilgamesh* Describes a Great Flood  
  - Page 1
- **Chapter 2**  
  The Egyptian Book of the Dead's Declaration of Innocence  
  - Page 4

### Ancient Greece

- **Chapter 3**  
  Plato on the Equality of Women in His *Republic*  
  - Page 6
- **Chapter 4**  
  Aristotle Describes a Well-Administered Polis  
  - Page 8

### Ancient Rome

- **Chapter 5**  
  Law in Early Roman Society: The Regulation of Women and Family  
  - Page 10
- **Chapter 6**  
  St. Augustine Denounces Paganism and Urges Romans to Enter *The City of God*  
  - Page 12
- **Chapter 7**  
  - Page 14

### Early Middle Ages

- **Chapter 8**  
  *The Qur’an*: Muslim Devotion to God  
  - Page 16
- **Chapter 9**  
  The Feudal Contract: Mutual Duties of Vassals and Lords  
  - Page 18

### High Middle Ages

- **Chapter 10**  
  College Students Write Home: Parents Respond  
  - Page 20
- **Chapter 11**  
  *Magna Carta*: The Great Charter of Liberties  
  - Page 22

### Late Middle Ages

- **Chapter 12**  
  *Canterbury Tales*: The Knight  
  - Page 24
- **Chapter 13**  
  The Trial of Joan of Arc  
  - Page 26

### Renaissance and Reformation

- **Chapter 14**  
  *The Prince*: Power Politics During the Italian Renaissance  
  - Page 28
- **Chapter 15**  
  A Renaissance Oration on Human Dignity  
  - Page 29
The Epic of Gilgamesh Describes a Great Flood (ca. 2700–2500 B.C.)

Questions to Consider

• Why did the god Enlil unleash the flood on the city of Shurrupak? What does this reveal about how the Babylonians viewed their gods and their environment?
• How were some of the inhabitants of Shurrupak able to survive this destructive event?

flame. A stupor of despair went up to heaven when the storm was riding. In front over hill and plain Shullat shifting of ballast above and below till two thirds was submerged. I loaded into her all that I had of gold and space was one acre, each side of the deck measured one hundred and twenty cubits, making a square. I built six decks below, seven in all, I divided them into nine sections with bulkheads between. I drove in wedges where needed, I saw to the punt-poles, and laid in supplies. The carriers brought oil in baskets, I poured pitch into the furnace and asphalt and oil; more oil was consumed in caulking, and more again the master of the boat took into his stores. I slaughtered bullocks for the people and every day I killed sheep. I gave the shipwrights wine to drink as though it were river water, raw wine and red wine and oil and white wine. There was feasting then as there is at the time of the New Year’s festival; I myself anointed my head. On the seventh day the boat was complete.

Then was the launching full of difficulty; there was shifting of ballast above and below till two thirds was submerged. I loaded into her all that I had of gold and of living things, my family, my kin, the beast of the field both wild and tame, and all the craftsmen. I sent them on board, for the time that Shamash had ordained was already fulfilled when he said, “In the evening, when the rider of the storm sends down the destroying rain, enter the boat and batten her down.” The time was fulfilled, the evening came, the rider of the storm sent down the rain. I looked out at the weather and it was terrible, so I too boarded the boat and battened her down. All was now complete, the battening and the caulking; so I handed the tiller to Puzur-Amurri the steersman, with the navigation and the care of the whole boat.

With the first light of dawn a black cloud came from the horizon; it thundered within where Adad, Lord of the storm was riding. In front over hill and plain Shullat and Hanish, heralds of the storm, led on. Then the gods of the abyss rose up; Nergal pulled out the dams of the nether waters, Ninurta the war-Lord threw down the dykes, and the seven judges of hell, the Annunaki, raised their torches, lighting the land with their livid flame. A stupor of despair went up to heaven when the god of the storm turned daylight to darkness, when he smashed the land like a cup. One whole day the tempest raged, gathering fury as it went, it poured over the people like the tide of battle; a man could not see his brother nor the people be seen from heaven. Even the gods were terrified at the flood, they fled to the highest heaven, the firmament of Anu; they crouched against the walls, cowering like curs. Then Ishtar the sweet-voiced Queen of Heaven cried out like a woman in travail: “Alas the days of old are turned to dust because I commanded evil; why did I command this evil in the council of all the gods? I commanded wars to destroy the people, but are they not my people, for I brought them forth? Now like the spawn of fish they float in the ocean.” The great gods of heaven and of hell wept, they covered their mouths.

For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world, tempest and flood raged together like warring hosts. When the seventh day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stifled; I looked at the face of the world and there was silence, all mankind was turned to clay. The surface of the sea stretched as flat as a roof-top; I opened a hatch and the light fell on my face. Then I bowed low, I sat down and I wept, the tears streamed down my face, for on every side was the waste of water. I looked for land in vain, but fourteen leagues distant there appeared a mountain, and there the boat grounded; on the mountain of Nisir she held fast, she held fast and did not budge. One day she held, and a second day on the mountain of Nisir she held fast and did not budge. A third day, and a fourth day she held fast on the mountain and did not budge; a fifth day and a sixth day she held fast on the mountain. When the seventh day dawned I loosed a dove and let her go. She flew away, but finding no resting-place she returned. Then I loosed a swallow, and she flew away but finding no resting-place she returned. Then I loosed a raven, she saw that the waters had retreated, she ate, she flew around, she cawed, and she did not come back. Then I threw everything open to the four winds, I made a sacrifice and poured out a libation on the mountain top. Seven and again seven cauldrons I set up on their stands, I heaped up wood and cane and cedar and myrtle. When the gods smelled the sweet savour, they gathered like flies over the sacrifice. Then, at last, Ishtar also came, she lifted her necklace with the jewels of heaven that once Anu had made to please her. “O you gods here present, by the lapis lazuli round my neck I shall remember these days as I remember the jewels of my throat; these last days I shall not forget. Let all the gods gather round the sacrifice, except Enlil. He shall not approach this offering, for without reflection he brought the flood; he consigned my people to destruction.”

‘When Enil had come, when he saw the boat, he was wroth and swelled with anger at the gods, the host of heaven, “Has any of these mortals escaped? Not one was to have survived the destruction.” Then the god of the wells and canals Ninurta opened his mouth and said to the warrior Enil, “Who is there of the gods that
can devise without Ea? It is Ea alone who knows all things.” Then Ea opened his mouth and spoke to warrior Enlil, “Wisest of gods, hero Enlil, how could you so senselessly bring down the flood?

Lay upon the sinner his sin,
Lay upon the transgressor his transgression,
Punish him a little when he breaks loose,
Do not drive him too hard or he perishes;
Would that a lion had ravaged mankind
Rather than the flood,
Would that a wolf had ravaged mankind
Rather than the flood,
Would that famine had wasted the world
Rather than the flood,

Would that pestilence had wasted mankind
Rather than the flood.

It was not I that revealed the secret of the gods; the wise man learned it in a dream. Now take your counsel what shall be done with him.”

‘Then Enlil went up into the boat, he took me by the hand and my wife and made us enter the boat and kneel down on either side, he standing between us. He touched our foreheads to bless us saying, “In time past Utnapishtim was a mortal man; henceforth he and his wife shall live in the distance at the mouth of the rivers.” Thus it was that the gods took me and placed me here to live in the distance, at the mouth of the rivers.’
The Egyptian Book of the Dead’s Declaration of Innocence (ca. 2100–1800 B.C.)

A N O N Y M O U S

This excerpt from the famous Egyptian Book of the Dead, which was likely compiled during the Middle Kingdom period, offers sage advice to the recently departed as they face final judgment. The Declaration of Innocence is not only a ritualistic device for the solace of souls, but is also a guide to the moral values of the Egyptians.

Questions to Consider

• What sorts of things should a person avoid doing in order to please his or her divine judges? Which is of greater consequence, transgressions against the gods or against fellow humans?
• How can we account for the fact that almost all of the proscriptions in the Declaration are negative: “I have not...”?

The Declaration of Innocence

To be said on reaching the Hall of the Two Truths so as to purge [name] of any sins committed and to see the face of every god:

Hail to you, great God, Lord of the Two Truths! I have come to you, my Lord, I was brought to see your beauty. I know you, I know the names of the forty-two gods, Who are with you in the Hall of the Two Truths, Who live by warding off evildoers, Who drink of their blood, On that day of judging characters before Wennofer.

Lo, your name is “He-of-Two-Daughters,” (And) “He-of-Maat’s-Two-Eyes.”

Lo, I come before you,

Bringing Maat to you, Having repelled evil for you. I have not done crimes against people, I have not mistreated cattle, I have not sinned in the Place of Truth. I have not known what should not be known, I have not done any harm. I did not begin a day by exacting more than my due, My name did not reach the bark of the mighty ruler. I have not blasphemed a god, I have not robbed the poor. I have not done what the god abhors, I have not maligned a servant to his master. I have not caused pain, I have not caused tears. I have not killed, I have not ordered to kill, I have not made anyone suffer. I have not damaged the offerings in the temples, I have not depleted the loaves of the gods, I have not stolen the cakes of the dead.

I have not copulated nor defiled myself.
I have not increased nor reduced the measure,
I have not diminished the arura.
I have not cheated in the fields.
I have not added to the weight of the balance,
I have not falsified the plummet of the scales.
I have not taken milk from the mouth of children,
I have not deprived cattle of their pasture.
I have not snared birds in the reeds of the gods,
I have not caught fish in their ponds.
I have not held back water in its season,
I have not dammed a flowing stream,
I have not quenched a needed fire.
I have not neglected the days of meat offerings,
I have not detained cattle belonging to the god,
I have not stopped a god in his procession.
I am pure, I am pure, I am pure, I am pure!
I am pure as is pure that great heron in Hnes.
I am truly the nose of the Lord of Breath,
Who sustains all the people,
On the day of completing the Eye in On,
In the second month of winter, last day,
In the presence of the lord of this land.
I have seen the completion of the Eye in On!
No evil shall befall me in this land,
In this Hall of the Two Truths;
For I know the names of the gods in it,
The followers of the great God!
Plato on the Equality of Women in His Republic (ca. 380 B.C.)

One of the greatest philosophers of the Classical Age, perhaps of all times, was Plato (ca. 427–347 B.C.). Plato was interested in many philosophical issues, including the conception of Platonic dualism in which he argued that there are ideal types but their physical manifestation never equals the ideal. As a political theorist Plato was motivated by the chaos resulting from the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.); the result was his Republic. Plato sought to understand how the Athenian polis had arrived at such a condition and how that condition could be avoided; the answer lay in the creation of the perfect polis, the Republic, composed of ideal citizens. In this ideal state, the baser parts (laborers and soldiers) would naturally defer to their intellectual superiors (philosopher-kings); classification was to be based upon intellectual ability. Moreover, as childcare would become the responsibility of the polis, women would be freed from this onerous obligation and could thus receive the same training as men, and would therefore be able to advance as far as their intellectual abilities allowed.

Questions to Consider

• How did Plato justify allowing women to participate in the governance of the Republic?

• How would the Republic benefit from the active participation of women as guardians?

Suppose then that we invite him to accompany us in the argument, and then we may hope to show him that there is nothing peculiar in the constitution of women which would affect them in the administration of the State.

By all means....

And can you mention any pursuit of mankind in which the male sex has not all these gifts and qualities in a higher degree than the female? Need I waste time in speaking of the art of weaving, and the management of pancakes and preserves, in which womankind does really appear to be great, and in which for her to be beaten by a man is of all things the most absurd?

Next, we shall ask our opponent how, in reference to any of the pursuits or arts of civic life, the nature of a woman differs from that of a man?

That will be quite fair.

And perhaps he, like yourself, will reply that to give a sufficient answer on the instant is not easy; but after a little reflection there is no difficulty.

Yes, perhaps.

You are quite right, he replied, in maintaining the general inferiority of the female sex: although many women are in many things superior to many men, yet on the whole what you say is true.

And if so, my friend, I said, there is no special faculty of administration in a state which a woman has because she is a woman, or which a man has by virtue of his sex, but the gifts of nature are alike diffused in both; all the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man.

Very true.

Then are we to impose all our enactments on men and none of them on women?

That will never do.

One woman has a gift of healing, another not; one is a musician, and another has no music in her nature?

Very true.

And one woman has a turn for gymnastic and military exercises, and another is unwarlike and hates gymnastics?

Certainly.

And one woman is a philosopher, and another is an enemy of philosophy; one has spirit, and another is without spirit?

That is also true.

Then one woman will have the temper of a guardian, and another not. Was not the selection of the male guardians determined by differences of this sort?

Yes.

Men and women alike possess the qualities which make a guardian; they differ only in their comparative strength or weakness.

Obviously.

And those women who have such qualities are to be selected as the companions and colleagues of men who have similar qualities and whom they resemble in capacity and in character?

Very true.

And ought not the same natures to have the same pursuits?

They ought.

Then, as we were saying before, there is nothing unnatural in assigning music and gymnastic to the wives of the guardians—to that point we come round again.

Certainly not.

Well, and may we not further say that our guardians are the best of our citizens?

By far the best.

And will not their wives be the best women?

Yes, by far the best.

And can there be anything better for the interests of the State than that the men and women of a State should be as good as possible?

There can be nothing better.

And this is what the arts of music and gymnastic, when present in such manner as we have described, will accomplish?

Certainly.

Then we have made an enactment not only possible but in the highest degree beneficial to the State?

True.

Then let the wives of our guardians strip, for their virtue will be their robe, and let them share in the toils of war and the defence of their country; only in the distribution of labours the lighter are to be assigned to the women, who are the weaker natures, but in other respects their duties are to be the same. And as for the man who laughs at naked women exercising their bodies from the best of motives, in his laughter he is plucking

A fruit of unripe wisdom,

and he himself is ignorant of what he is laughing at, or what he is about;—for that is, and ever will be, the best of sayings, That the useful is the noble and the hurtful is the base.
Aristotle Describes a Well-Administered Polis
(ca. 340 B.C.)

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was the most famous student of Plato (ca. 427–347 B.C.) but disagreed with much of Plato's philosophy. With the founding of his own school, the Peripatetic school, Aristotle's influence would expand greatly. A daring thinker who examined many and diverse areas of philosophy and science, Aristotle would later exert a great influence on medieval scholarship. In this document Aristotle discusses the nature of the perfect polis. While he lived in an era in which the Greek city-states were in decline, Aristotle continued to believe that the polis provided the best model of political organization. In his *Politics*, Aristotle rejects the utopian world presented by Plato's *Republic* in favor of a more realistic political community based upon the talent (as in Plato's view) but also the moderation of its citizens.

Questions to Consider
• According to Aristotle, how should the relationship between state and citizen be organized?
• What is the basis of a well-administered, and thus happy, state?

Since our proposed object is to inquire what government is best, namely, that by which a state may be best administered, and that state would seem best administered where the people are the happiest, it is evident that the nature of happiness is a thing which ought not to escape us. Now, we have already said in our treatise on Ethics, (if there be any use in what we there said,) that happiness consists in the energy and perfect practice of virtue, and this not relatively, but simply. I mean by relatively, what is necessary in some certain circumstances; by simply, what is good in itself. Of the first sort are just punishments and restraints in a just cause; for they arise from virtue, and are necessary, and on that account are virtuous; (though it is more desirable, that neither any state or any individual should stand in need of such things;) but those actions which are directed to procure either honours or wealth are simply best. For the one are eligible as tending to remove an evil: these actions, on the contrary, are the foundation and means of producing relative good. A worthy man indeed will bear poverty, disease, and other unfortunate accidents, with a noble mind, but happiness consists in the contrary to these. Now we have already determined in our treatise on Ethics, that he is a man of worth who considers what is good because it is virtuous, as what is simply good: it is evident, therefore, that the using these things in such a manner must be worthy and simply good. This has led some persons to conclude that the cause of happiness was external goods; which would be as if any one should attribute to the lyre itself a brilliant and noble

performance, and not to the art itself. It necessarily fol-
lows from what has been said, that some things should
be ready at hand and others procured by the legislator:
for which reason, we earnestly wish that the constitu-
tion of the state may have those things which are under
the dominion of fortune—(for over some things we
admit her to be supreme);—but for a state to be worthy
and great is not the work of fortune only, but of knowl-
edge and deliberate choice as well. But for a state to be
worthy, it is necessary that those citizens who are in the
administration should be worthy also: but in our city
every citizen has a share in the state. And so we must
consider how a man may become worthy. For if the
whole body could become worthy, and not some indi-
viduals only, it would be more desirable; for then it
would follow, that what might be done by one, might
be done by all. Men are worthy and good in three ways;
and these are, by nature, by custom, by reason. In the
first place, each one ought to be born a man, and not
any other animal; that is to say, he ought to be of a par-
ticular disposition both in body and soul. But as to
some things, it avails not to be born with them, for cus-
tom makes great alterations: for there are some things
in nature capable of alteration either way, and which
are fixed by custom, either for the better or the worse.
Now, other animals live chiefly a life of mere nature,
and in very few things according to custom; but man
lives according to reason also, with which he alone is
endowed; wherfore he ought to make all these accord
with each other: for if they are persuaded that it is best
to follow some other way, men oftentimes act contrary
to nature and custom....
Law in Early Roman Society: The Regulation of Women and Family (ca. Seventh Century; 451–450 B.C.)

NUMA POMPILIUS; ANONYMOUS

Much of what historians know about the early Roman Republic has come from law codes. Law codes are an excellent source to reveal those things which a society values and criminalizes, and how a society regulates relationships among citizens and within families. In this selection, a group of laws from early Roman law codes, including the fundamental Twelve Tables of the early Republic, provide the modern reader with a view of Roman ideals concerning gender and family.

Questions to Consider

- These laws seem to focus greatly on children and property. Why?
- What can we infer about the status of women from these laws?

11. If a daughter-in-law strikes her father-in-law she shall be dedicated as a sacrifice to his ancestral deities.

Laws attributed to Numa Pompilius; traditional dates, 716–673 B.C.

9. On the vestal virgins he conferred high honours, among which was the right of making a will while their fathers lived and of doing all other juristic acts without a guardian.

12. A royal law forbids the burial of a pregnant woman before the child is extracted from the womb. Whoever violates this law is deemed to have destroyed the child’s expectancy of life along with the mother.

13. A concubine shall not touch the Altar of Juno. If she touches it she shall sacrifice, with her hair unbound, a ewe lamb to Juno.

The Twelve Tables. Rome; traditional dates, 450 B.C.

Table IV. Paternal power

1. A notably deformed child shall be killed immediately.

3. To repudiate his wife her husband shall order her...to have her own property for herself, shall take the keys, shall expel her.

4. A child born within ten months of the father’s death shall enter into the inheritance...

Table V. Inheritance and guardianship
1. …Women, even though they are of full age, because of their levity of mind shall be under guardianship…except vestal virgins, who…shall be free from guardianship.

2. The conveyable possessions of a woman who is under guardianship of male agnates shall not be acquired by prescriptive right unless they are transferred by the woman herself with the authorisation of her guardian...

4. If anyone who has no direct heir dies intestate the nearest male agnate shall have the estate.
St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was one of, if not the most, influential of the Latin Fathers. He is rightly credited with creating a synthesis between Christianity and pagan Greco-Roman culture. He was also influential in the fight against heresy, such as the Donatist heresy. His works, including *The City of God*, which is excerpted in this selection, represent a major source of the theological doctrine of Christian religion. In *The City of God*, Augustine also enunciated a Christian view of history. *The City of God* is comprised of twenty-two books, ten of which are denunciations of paganism and twelve of which trace the historical development of Christianity as the rightful successor of pagan religions.

Augustine weighed in on the controversy then raging as to who was to blame for the sack of Rome in 410; many non-Christians argued that the sack was the result of the wrath of the traditional Roman deities, now discarded by the Romans, and that only allegiance to these gods could prevent further disasters. Christians, of course, maintained a different interpretation—that pagan Romans had brought down the wrath of the Christian God and that only by foreswearing the pagan idols of the past and pledging their faith in God could Romans escape future calamities. The ultimate message of *The City of God* is that the City (as the Romans referred to Rome) to which one owes primary allegiance is not the temporal city but the heavenly city of God.

Questions to Consider
- What evidence is there in this excerpt of Augustine's reverence for pre-Christian Greco-Roman civilization?
- According to Augustine, what was the cause of Rome's troubles and how could those troubles be alleviated?
Cicero, a weighty man, and a philosopher in his way, when about to be made edile, wished the citizens to understand that, among the other duties of his magistracy, he must propitiate Flora by the celebration of games. And these games are reckoned devout in proportion to their lewdness. In another place, and when he was now consul, and the state in great peril, he says that games had been celebrated for ten days together, and that nothing had been omitted which could pacify the gods: as if it had not been more satisfactory to irritate the gods by temperance, than to pacify them by debauchery; and to provoke their hate by honest living, than soothe it by such unseemly grossness....

They, then, are but abandoned and ungrateful wretches, in deep and fast bondage to that malign spirit, who complain and murmur that men are rescued by the name of Christ from the hellish thraldom of these unclean spirits, and from a participation in their punishment, and are brought out of the night of pestilential ungodliness into the light of most healthful piety. Only such men could murmur that the masses flock to the churches and their chaste acts of worship, where a seemly separation of the sexes is observed; where they learn how they may so spend this earthly life, as to merit a blessed eternity hereafter; where Holy Scripture and instruction in righteousness are proclaimed from a raised platform in presence of all, that both they who do the word may hear to their salvation, and they who do it not may hear to judgment. And though some enter who scoff at such precepts, all their petulance is either quenched by a sudden change, or is restrained through fear or shame. For no filthy and wicked action is there set forth to be gazed at or to be imitated; but either the precepts of the true God are recommended, His miracles narrated, His gifts praised, or His benefits implored.

This, rather, is the religion worthy of your desires, O admirable Roman race,—the progeny of your Scaevolas and Scipios, of Regulus, and of Fabricius. This rather covet, this distinguish from that foul vanity and crafty malice of the devils. If there is in your nature any eminent virtue, only by true piety is it purged and perfected, while by impiety it is wrecked and punished. Choose now what you will pursue, that your praise may be not in yourself, but in the true God, in whom is no error. For of popular glory you have had your share; but by the secret providence of God, the true religion was not offered to your choice. Awake, it is now day; as you have already awaked in the persons of some in whose perfect virtue and sufferings for the true faith we glory: for they, contending on all sides with hostile powers, and conquering them all by bravely dying, have purchased for us this country of ours with their blood; to which country we invite you, and exhort you to add yourselves to the number of the citizens of this city, which also has a sanctuary of its own in the true remission of sins. Do not listen to those degenerate sons of thine who slander Christ and Christians, and impute to them these disastrous times, though they desire times in which they may enjoy rather impunity for their wickedness than a peaceful life. Such has never been Rome’s ambition even in regard to her earthly country. Lay hold now on the celestial country, which is easily won, and in which you will reign truly and for ever. For there shalt thou find no vestal fire, no Capitoline stone, but the one true God.

No date, no goal will here ordain:
But grant an endless, boundless reign.

No longer, then, follow after false and deceitful gods; abjure them rather, and despise them, bursting forth into true liberty. Gods they are not, but malignant spirits, to whom your eternal happiness will be a sore punishment.


Much of the information concerning early Christianity is extremely difficult to interpret. The most obvious source, the synoptic Gospels were composed some years after the death of Christ (4 B.C.–A.D. 29); Matthew, for example, was composed sometime after A.D. 70, probably around A.D. 80. Thus the Gospels are not strictly biographies in the literal sense, as they present interpretations of the early teachings of Christ that are reflective of different groups in early Christianity. Some groups adhered to Jewish traditions and laws while others, particularly the Christian communities established by the Apostle Paul in the Greek-speaking world, eschewed Jewish traditions and ceremonies in an effort to make Christianity more palatable to non-Jewish believers. With the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, at the end of the Jewish revolt (A.D. 67–70), Paul’s brand of Christianity became the most prevalent. In this selection, the Sermon on the Mount, from the Gospel According to St. Matthew, presents what most Biblical scholars believe to be the actual teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Most scholars agree that in this passage Jesus was addressing his fellow Jews, not gentiles. Regardless of the target audience, the message of Jesus Christ is apparent.

Questions to Consider

- What evidence is there that Jesus is speaking to Jews in the Sermon on the Mount?
- What is the essence of this Sermon? Using specific quotes from the Sermon, analyze the message of Jesus Christ.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light
a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candle-
stick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
Let your light so shine before men, that they may see
your good works, and glorify your Father which is in
heaven.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the
prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For ver-
ily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or
one tittle shal in no wise pass from the law, till all be
fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these
least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall
be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but
whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be
called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto
you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the
righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in
no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,
Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in
danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That
whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause
shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall
say to his brother, Raca, shall be in dan-
ger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool,
shall be in dan-
ger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the
altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath
aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar,
and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and
then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adver-
sary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at
any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and
the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast
into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no
means come out thence, till thou hast paid the utter-
most farthing.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt
perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s
throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither
by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither
shall thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not
make one hair white or black. But let your communica-
tion be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than
these cometh of evil.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an
eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye
resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy
right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man
will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him
have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee
to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh
thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not
thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love
thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto
you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do
good to them that hate you, and pray for them which
despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may
be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he
maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and
sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love
them which love you, what reward have ye? do not
even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your
brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not
even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as
your Father which is in heaven is perfect.
The Qur’an: Muslim Devotion to God (c. 650)

MUHAMMAD THE PROPHET

Muhammad (c. 570–632) grew up in a relatively poor, but very religious family in the Arabian transportation and trade hub of Mecca. Working for caravan companies gave Muhammad the opportunity to travel widely, encountering people of many religious faiths, including Jews and Christians. Life changed at age thirty when he married Khadija, the widow of a caravan owner. Now wealthy, Muhammad could concentrate on religious interests. His desert meditations produced experiences in which Muhammad heard the voices of angels, especially Gabriel. These revelations, collected over the course of Muhammad’s life, became the core of Islam: the Qur’an. In the century after his death, the religion he founded, Islam (meaning “submission to the will of God”), spread east from Arabia to Egypt and Persia and west throughout northern Africa and into southern Europe, challenging both Byzantium and the Latin world. Understanding the development of Islam must be seen as fundamental to understanding the development of Christian Europe: east and west.

Questions to Consider

• How does the Muslim portrayal of God compare to those descriptions from the other two monotheistic faiths, Judaism and Christianity?
• During the early Middle Ages, Islam experienced rapid growth, converting millions of people from Spain to Persia. How does this selection from the Qur’an help explain Islam’s enormous appeal?

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds!
The Compassionate, the Merciful!
King of the day of judgment!
Thee we worship, and Thee we ask for help.
Guide us in the straight way,

The way of those to whom Thou art gracious;
Not of those upon whom is Thy wrath, nor of the erring.

In the name of the merciful and compassionate God. That is the book! there is no doubt therein; a guide to the pious, who believe in the unseen, and are steadfast in prayer, and of what we have given them expend in alms; who believe in what is revealed to thee, and what was revealed before thee, and of the hereafter they are sure. These are in guidance from their Lord, and these are the prosperous.

Source: James Harvey Robinson, ed., Readings in European History (Boston: Ginn, 1904), 1:116–120.
Verily, those who misbelieve, it is the same to them if ye warn them or if ye warn them not, they will not believe. God has set a seal upon their hearts and on their hearing; and on their eyes is dimness, and for them is grievous woe. There are, indeed, those among men who say, “We believe in God and in the last day”; but they do not believe. They would deceive God and those who do believe; but they deceive only themselves and they do not perceive. In their hearts is a sickness, and God has made them still more sick, and for them is grievous woe because they lied.

And if ye are in doubt of what we have revealed unto our servant, then bring a chapter like it, and call your witnesses other than God if ye tell truth. But if ye do it not, and ye shall surely do it not, then fear the fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for misbelievers. But bear the glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that for them are gardens beneath which rivers flow. Whenever they are provided with fruit therefrom they say, “This is what we were provided with before, and they shall be provided with the like; and there are pure wives for them therein, and they shall dwell therein for aye.”

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Have we not made the earth as a bed? And the mountains as tent-pegs? and created you in pairs, and made you sleep for rest, and made the night for a mantle, and made the day for bread-winning, and built above you seven firmaments, and put therein a burning lamp, and sent down water pouring from the squeezed clouds to bring forth grain and herb withal, and gardens thick with trees?

Lo! the Day of Decision is appointed—the day when there shall be a blowing of the trumpet, and ye shall come in troops, and the heavens shall be opened, and be full of gates, and the mountains shall be removed, and turn into [mist]. Verily hell lieth in wait, the goal for rebels, to abide therein for ages; they shall not taste therein coolness nor drink, save scalding water and running sores,—a meet reward! Verily they did not expect the reckoning, and they denied our signs with lies; but everything have we recorded in a book:

Then the people of the right hand—what people of good omen! And the people of the left hand—what people of ill omen! And the outstrippers, still outstripping:—these are the nearest [to God], in gardens of delight; a crowd of the men of yore, and a few of the latter days; upon inwrought couches, reclining thereon face to face. Youths ever young shall go unto them round about with goblets and ewers and a cup of flowing wine,—their heads shall not ache with it, neither shall they be confused; and fruits of their choice, and flesh of birds of their desire; and damsels with bright eyes like hidden pearls,—a reward for what they have wrought. They shall hear no folly therein, nor any sin, but only the greeting, “Peace! peace!”

And the people of the right hand—what people of good omen! Amid thornless lote-trees, and bananas laden with fruit, and shade outspread, and water flowing, and fruit abundant, never failing, nor forbidden... But the people of the left hand—what people of ill omen!—amid burning wind and scalding water, and a shade of black smoke, not cool or grateful! Verily before that they were prosperous; but they persisted in the most grievous sin, and used to say, “When we have died, and become dust and bones, shall we indeed be raised again, and our fathers, the men of yore.” Say: Verily those of yore and of the latter days shall surely be gathered to the trysting-place of a day which is known. Then ye, O ye who err and call it a lie, shall surely eat of the tree of Zakkum, and fill your bellies with it, and drink upon it scalding water,—drink like the thirsty camel:—this shall be their entertainment on the Day of Judgment!
The Feudal Contract: Mutual Duties of Vassals and Lords
(c. 1020)

Fulbert of Chartres

One of the most respected and honored men of his day, Bishop Fulbert of Chartres (c. 970–1028) corresponded regularly with high nobles and fellow church leaders. A leading scholar and teacher at the famous school of Chartres, Fulbert’s reputation inspired many men of authority to seek his advice on both secular and religious matters, among them Duke William V of Aquitaine. Fulbert served Duke William as treasurer of St. Hilaire at Poitiers and held other feudal positions as well, both as lord and as vassal. The following letter to Duke William reflects Fulbert’s view of feudal responsibilities.

Questions to Consider

• Rules of conduct usually develop in response to problems that need to be corrected. What characteristics does Fulbert emphasize in his list of responsibilities? What problems within feudal relationships might he be trying to address?

• The fire that Fulbert refers to at the end of this letter required him to oversee the rebuilding of Chartres Cathedral. How does this point illustrate the secular responsibilities of a bishop at this time?

Asked to write something concerning the form of fealty, I have noted briefly for you, on the authority of the books, the things which follow. He who swears fealty to his lord ought always to have these six things in memory: what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, practicable. Harmless, that is to say, that he should not injure his lord in his body; safe, that he should not injure him by betraying his secrets or the defenses upon which he relies for safety; honorable, that he should not injure him in his justice or in other matters that pertain to his honor; useful, that he should not injure him in his possessions; easy and practicable, that that good which his lord is able to do easily he make not difficult, nor that which is practicable he make not impossible to him.

That the faithful vassal should avoid these injuries is certainly proper, but not for this alone does he deserve his holding; for it is not sufficient to abstain from evil, unless what is good is done also. It remains, therefore, that in the same six things mentioned above he should faithfully counsel and aid his lord, if he wishes to be looked upon as worthy of his benefice and to be safe concerning the fealty which he has sworn.

The lord also ought to act toward his faithful vassal reciprocally in all these things. And if he does not do this, he will be justly considered guilty of bad faith, just as the former, if he should be detected in avoiding or

consenting to the avoidance of his duties, would be per-
fidious and perjured.
I would have written to you at greater length, if I had not been occupied with many other things, including the rebuilding of our city and church, which was lately entirely consumed in a terrible fire; from which loss, though we could not for a while be diverted, yet by the hope of God’s comfort and of yours we breathe again.
College Students Write Home: Parents Respond (Thirteenth Century)

V A R I O U S  A U T H O R S

Student life during the Middle Ages included many of the same basic features as student life today, including the process of getting an education (attending lectures, studying, taking exams) and the complexities of living away from home for the first time (housing, food and drink, social activities). Then, as today, students sometimes found balancing these obligations difficult; the excitement of separation from parents could be checked by the hard realization of new responsibilities. The following document includes examples of student letters sent home and a few return letters from parents. Although they are interesting, student letters usually came right out of a “form book” containing model letters for every need (often involving financial problems). A crafty student would search for the form letter closest to his situation and then modify it to fit his purposes.

Questions to Consider

• These letters come from English, French, German, and Italian students and parents. What features of medieval college life seem universal?
• How does this picture of medieval college life compare with life as a college student today?

Safe Arrival

After my departure from your gracious presence the circumstances of my journey continued to improve until by divine assistance I arrived safely in the city of Brünn [Moravia], where I have had the good fortune to obtain lodgings with a certain citizen who has two boys in school and provides me with food and clothing in sufficient amount. I have also found here an upright and worthy master, of distinguished reputation and varied attainments, who imparts instruction faithfully; all my fellow pupils, too, are modest, courteous, and of good character, cherishing no hatred but giving mutual assistance in the acquirement of knowledge and in honour preferring one another.

Hard at Work

To their very dear and respected parents M. Martre, knight, and M. his wife, M. and S. their sons send greetings and filial obedience. This is to inform you that, by divine mercy, we are living in good health in the city of Orleans and are devoting ourselves wholly to study, mindful of the words of Cato, “To know anything is praiseworthy,” etc. We occupy a good and comely dwelling, next door but one to the schools and market-

place, so that we can go to school every day without wetting our feet. We have also good companions in the house with us, well advanced in their studies and of excellent habits—an advantage which we well appreciate, for as the Psalmist says, “With an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright,” etc. (Psalms, xviii. 25). Wherefore lest production cease from lack of material, we beg your paternity to send us by the bearer, B., money for buying parchment, ink, a desk, and the other things which we need in sufficient amount that we may suffer no want on your account (God forbid!) but finish our studies and return home with honour. The bearer will also take charge of the shoes and stockings which you have to send us, and any news as well.

Send Money

B. to his venerable master A., greeting. This is to inform you that I am studying at Oxford with the greatest diligence, but the matter of money stands greatly in the way of my promotion, as it is now two months since I spent the last of what you sent me. The city is expensive and makes many demands; I have to rent lodgings, buy necessaries, and provide for many other things which I cannot now specify. Wherefore I respectfully beg your paternity that by the promptings of divine pity you may assist me, so that I may be able to complete what I have well begun. For you must know that without Ceres [bread] and Bacchus [wine] Apollo [the god of Wisdom] grows cold.

In Debt

Well-beloved father, I have not a penny, nor can I get any save through you, for all things at the University are so dear: nor can I study in my Code or my Digest [law books], for they are all tattered. Moreover, I owe ten crowns in dues to the Provost, and can find no man to lend them to me; I send you word of greetings and of money.

The Student hath need of many things if he will profit here; his father and his kin must needs supply him freely, that he be not compelled to pawn his books, but have ready money in his purse, with gowns and furs and decent clothing, or he will be damned for a beggar; wherefore, that men may not take me for a beast, I send you word of greetings and of money.

Wines are dear, and hostels, and other good things; I owe in every street, and am hard beseated to free myself from such snares. Dear father, deign to help me! I fear to be excommunicated; already have I been cited, and there is not even a dry bone in my larder. If I find not the money before this feast of Easter, the church door will be shut in my face: wherefore grant my supplication, for I send you word of greetings and of money.

Report Card

I have learned—not from your master, although he ought not to hide such things from me, but from a certain trustworthy source—that you do not study in your room or act in the schools as a good student should, but play and wander about, disobedient to your master and indulging in sport and in certain other dishonorable practices which I do not now care to explain by letter.

Party Time

To his son G. residing at Orleans P. of Besançon sends greeting with paternal zeal. It is written, ‘He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.’ I have recently discovered that you live dissolutely and slothfully, preferring license to restraint and play to work and strumming a guitar while the others are at their studies, whence it happens that you have read but one volume of law while your more industrious companions have read several. Wherefore I have decided to exhort you herewith to repent utterly of your dissolute and careless ways, that you may no longer be called a waster and that your shame may be turned to good repute.

Graduation

Sing unto the Lord a new song, praise him with stringed instruments and organs, rejoice upon the high-sounding cymbals, for your son has held a glorious disputation [in Bologna], which was attended by a great number of teachers and scholars. He answered all questions without a mistake, and no one could get the better of him or prevail against his arguments. Moreover he celebrated a famous banquet, at which both rich and poor were honoured as never before, and he has duly begun to give lectures which are already so popular that others’ classrooms are deserted and his own are filled.
Magna Carta: The Great Charter of Liberties (1215)

King John of England

When King John (r. 1199–1216) met a large force of rebellious English barons in 1215 at Runnymede, near Windsor, he neared the end of a remarkably unsuccessful reign. Hugely unpopular with the nobility and urban leaders due to his effective but unorthodox methods of taxation, John had (during the previous year) lost a political confrontation with the pope and suffered a crushing military defeat at the hands of the French king, losing most of England’s Continental possessions in the process. Abandoned by all but a few supporters, John had little choice but to accede to his barons’ demands for a guarantee of traditional rights and liberties. The “Great Charter” he signed that day reaffirmed an English tradition of monarchical submission to the rule of law, particularly regarding personal freedom and property.

Questions to Consider

• Some of the selected provisions below refer to fees owed the king due to feudal marriages. Why was control over a vassal’s wedding plans important to a feudal lord?
• Which of the following provisions still seem relevant today?

John, by the grace of God, king of England, lord of Ireland, duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and count of Anjou, to the archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls, barons...and faithful subjects, greeting...

We have...granted to all free men of our kingdom, for ourselves and our heirs, for ever, all the liberties written below, to be had and held by them and their heirs of us and our heirs...

No widow shall be forced to marry so long as she wishes to live without a husband, provided that she gives security not to marry without our consent if she holds [a fief] of us, or without the consent of her lord of whom she holds, if she holds of another.

No scutage [payment in lieu of performing military service] or aid shall be imposed in our kingdom unless by common counsel of our kingdom, except for ransom ing our person, for making our eldest son a knight, and for once marrying our eldest daughter; and for these only a reasonable aid shall be levied...

Neither we nor our bailiffs will take, for castles or other works of ours, timber which is not ours, except with the agreement of him whose timber it is.

We will not hold for more than a year and a day the lands of those convicted of felony, and then the lands shall be handed over to the lords of the fiefs.

No free man shall be arrested or imprisoned or dispossessed or outlawed or exiled or in any way victimized, neither will we attack him or send anyone to attack him, except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.

To no one will we sell, to no one will we refuse or delay right or justice.

We will not make justices, constables, sheriffs or bailiffs save of such as know the law of the kingdom and mean to observe it well.
Canterbury Tales: 
*The Knight* (c. 1400)

**GEOFFREY CHAUCER**

During the time of the early Renaissance in northern Italy, an English bureaucrat and diplomat in the still quite medieval royal courts of Edward III (r. 1327–1377) and Richard II (r. 1377–1399) fashioned a literary career equal to the best of the Florentine civic humanists. Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340–1400) produced a body of poetry remarkable not only for its penetrating insights into English society but also for the fact that he wrote in the common English vernacular, practically defining “Middle English” as a literary language. His best known and most important work, *The Canterbury Tales*, uses a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket as its setting. In the opening section of the poem (part of which follows), Chaucer describes a broad spectrum of English society in a series of quick sketches.

**Questions to Consider**

- Some of Chaucer’s characterizations are satirical and some are not. Is his description of the knight serious or comical?
- How does the knight’s career show connections between religious authority and military power during the Middle Ages?

---

A knight there was, and he a worthy man, Who, from the moment that he first began To ride about the world, loved chivalry, Truth, honour, freedom and all courtesy. Full worthy was he in his liege-lord’s war, And therein had he ridden (none more far) As well in Christendom as heathenesse, And honoured everywhere for worthiness. At Alexandria, he, when it was won; Full oft the table’s roster he’d begun Above all nations’ knights in Prussia. In Latvia raided he, and Russia, No christened man so oft of his degree. In far Granada at the siege was he Of Algeciras,¹ and in Belmarie. At Ayas was he and at Satalye When they were won, and on the Middle Sea At many a noble meeting chanced to be. Of mortal battles he had fought fifteen, And he’d fought for our faith at Tramissene Three times in lists, and each time slain his foe. This self-same worthy knight had been also At one time with the lord of Palatyne Against another heathen in Turkey: And always won he sovereign fame for prize. Though so illustrious, he was very wise

---

¹ Various campaigns against the Muslims in Southern Spain and North Africa are named here.
And bore himself as meekly as a maid. He never yet had any vileness said, In all his life, to whatsoever wight. He was a truly perfect, gentle knight. But now, to tell you all of his array, His steeds were good, but yet he was not gay. Of simple fustian wore he a jupon Sadly discoloured by his habergeon; For he had lately come from his voyage And now was going on this pilgrimage.
The Trial of Joan of Arc
(1431)

ANONYMOUS

After the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, much of France lay in the hands of the victorious English and their Burgundian allies. Fourteen years later the situation for the French had not improved. A virtually powerless King Charles VII (r. 1422–1461), still uncrowned since the ceremonial city of Reims was in enemy territory, looked as if he might be the last king of France. Yet the year 1429 would signal one of the most amazing reversals of fortune in Western history, beginning with the appearance of a teenage farm girl from Champagne, Joan of Arc (c. 1412–1431). Convinced that God had ordered her to save the French king and the French nation by defeating the English, Joan managed to gain support among King Charles's tough military guard and eventually gained the confidence of the lackluster king himself. Female visionaries were not uncommon in the fifteenth century, and Charles had little to lose by relying on fortune. A string of impressive victories by Joan's army gained Charles his crown and helped begin to turn the tide of the war in France's favor. Unfortunately for her, the Burgundians captured Joan in 1430, and, after offering her for ransom to an ungrateful King Charles, sold her to the British. The following document is an excerpt from her trial in Normandy for heresy that resulted in her execution.

Questions to Consider
• How does the following testimony seek to prove that Joan is not a heretic?
• What image do you get of Joan as a warrior?

Joan [to her inquisitors]: When I was thirteen years old, I had a voice from God to help me govern my conduct. And the first time I was very fearful. And came this voice, about the hour of noon, in the summer-time, in my father's garden.... I heard the voice on the right-hand side...and rarely do I hear it without a brightness.... It has taught me to conduct myself well, to go habitually to church.... The voice told me that I should raise the siege laid to the city of Orleans...and me, I answered it that I was a poor girl who knew not how to ride nor lead in war.

Jean Pasquerel [priest, Joan's confessor]: “On the morrow, Saturday, I rose early and celebrated mass. And Joan went out against the fortress of the bridge where was the Englishman Clasidas. And the assault lasted there from morning until sunset. In this assault...Joan...was struck by an arrow above the breast, and when she felt herself wounded she was afraid and wept.... And some soldiers, seeing her so wounded, wanted to apply a charm to her wound, but she would not have it, saying: “I would rather die than do a thing which I know to be a sin or against the will of

God.”...But if to her could be applied a remedy without sin, she was very willing to be cured. And they put on to her wound olive oil and lard. And after that had been applied, Joan made her confession to me, weeping and lamenting.”

Count Dunois: “The assault lasted from the morning until eight...so that there was hardly hope of victory that day. So that I was going to break off and...withdraw.... Then the Maid came to me and required me to wait yet a while. She...mounted her horse and retired alone into a vineyard.... And in this vineyard she remained at prayer.... Then she came back...at once seized her standard in hand and placed herself on the parapet of the trench, and the moment she was there the English trembled and were terrified. The king’s soldiers regained courage and began to go up, charging against the boulevard without meeting the least resistance.”

Jean Pasquerel: “Joan returned to the charge, crying and saying: ‘Classidas, Classidas, yield thee, yield thee to the King of Heaven; thou hast called me 'whore’; I take great pity on thy soul and thy people’s! Then Classidas, armed from head to foot, fell into the river of Loire and was drowned. And Joan, moved by pity, began to weep much for the soul of Classidas and the others who were drowned in great numbers.”...
The Prince: Power Politics During the Italian Renaissance (1513)

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) served as an important official in the government of Florence during the Republican period after the fall of Savonarola in 1498. When invading Spaniards restored the Medici family to power in 1512, the new rulers tortured Machiavelli and expelled him from Florence. In exile, Machiavelli studied ancient history and produced a good History of Florence. A versatile writer, besides his famous historical and political commentaries, he also penned witty comedic satires about Florentine society. Machiavelli hated exile and wrote The Prince as an attempt to prove his value to the government in Florence, shamelessly dedicating the book to the Medicis. In The Prince, Machiavelli combined classical techniques of historical writing with modern political analysis; the book has remained controversial ever since it first appeared. Machiavelli's underlying analysis reflects a low opinion of human nature and emphasizes the random nature of events. He discusses the relationship between ruler and ruled in frank terms, arguing, for example, that it is much better for a prince to be feared than loved but also that a prince must avoid being hated at all costs. He advises the successful ruler to inflict injuries all at once (getting necessary violence over with as quickly as possible) and notes that a wise prince will delegate unpopular duties to others. Machiavelli's candid opinions about the most effective means of taking and holding political power shocked many people at the time, and the term “machiavellian” is still used today to describe certain politicians, governments, and political practices. While many of the points Machiavelli raises in this book hardly seem startling by modern political standards, The Prince addresses questions about proper and improper political behavior and tactics that are still hotly debated today.

Questions to Consider

• Do you agree with Machiavelli’s assessment of human nature? Is he cynical or is he realistic?
• What does this document tell you about the state of the Renaissance papacy on the eve of the Protestant Reformation?
A Renaissance Oration on Human Dignity (1486)

GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA

During the Renaissance of the fifteenth century, scholars throughout western and central Europe (especially in northern Italy) recovered much of the classical learning unavailable to Western scholars during the Middle Ages. In Florence, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) led a Neo-Platonic revival attracting many outstanding scholars including the young nobleman, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). Trained by scholastics in Paris and fascinated with the study of ancient languages (especially Hebrew), Pico became the most brilliant philosopher of his age. A universalist at heart, Pico attempted to reconcile all knowledge in his Conclusiones, published in Rome in 1486. When the pope declared a few passages of this work to be heretical, Pico suffered a brief imprisonment before returning to Florence where he continued his career until his early death from plague at age thirty-two. In the “Oration on the Dignity of Man,” intended as a preface to the Conclusiones, Pico celebrates humans above all others in creation but also emphasizes that a person’s ultimate fate is a matter of free will.

Questions to Consider

- Some scholars argue that the increased emphasis on human achievement diminished the importance of religion during the Renaissance. How does this passage from Pico relate to that argument?
- Pico della Mirandola believed that he could synthesize all knowledge into a coherent whole. Is this a tenable idea?

At last it seems to me I have come to understand why man is the most fortunate of creatures and consequently worthy of all admiration and what precisely is that rank which is his lot in the universal chain of Being—a rank to be envied not only by brutes but even by the stars and by minds beyond this world. It is a matter past faith and a wondrous one.

Why should it not be? For it is on this very account that man is rightly called and judged a great miracle and a wonderful creature indeed....

O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of man! To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills. Beasts as soon as they are born (so says Lucilius) bring with them from their mother’s womb all they will ever possess. Spiritual beings, either from the beginning or soon thereafter, become what they are to be for ever and ever. On man when he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all kinds and the germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit. If they be veg-

etative, he will be like a plant. If sensitive, he will become brutish. If rational, he will grow into a heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, happy in the lot of no created thing, he withdraws into the center of his own unity, his spirit, made one with God, in the solitary darkness of God, who is set above all things, shall surpass them all. Who.

would not admire this our chameleon? Or who could more greatly admire aught else whatever? It is man who Asclepius of Athens, arguing from his mutability of character and from his self-transforming nature, on just grounds says was symbolized by Proteus in the mysteries. Hence those metamorphoses renowned among the Hebrews and the Pythagoreans....