

A World Lit Only by Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance: Portrait of an Age Study Guide

A World Lit Only by Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance: Portrait of an Age by William Manchester

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Plot Summary

A World Lit Only By Fire is William Manchester's attempt to write a book of popular history defending the increasingly unpopular view among historians that the medieval world was culturally, religiously, and technologically backward. This world was destroyed by the blossoming of confidence in reason and the progress of art, literacy, astronomy, geography, and theology. The book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter introduces Manchester's conception of the medieval mindset. The second chapter includes a lengthy discussion about how this mindset was continuously challenged by a number of individuals and movements. Finally, the last chapter explores in detail the adventure of Ferdinand Magellan whom Manchester believes shattered the medieval mind and heralded the coming of modernity.

In Chapter I, *The Medieval Mind*, Manchester quickly and polemically describes the period from 400 A.D. to 1400 A.D. as the "Dark Ages" even though this term is not used in scholarly research. His claim is that the medieval period saw an extreme decline in standards of living, not only due to crumbling political institutions and infrastructure but to disease, isolation, and religious oppression. Manchester emphasizes just how savage medieval people were and how they imposed horrific punishments on one another. Despite Jesus' teachings, Christians butchers one another en masse. The conditions were so terrible that Manchester claims that the medieval West was not a civilization at all, but a decaying shadow of the Roman Empire. But by 1500 A.D. a number of medieval institutions sufficiently died back to allow a new mindset to arise.

Chapter II, *The Shattering*, details the intellectual movements that destroyed the medieval mind and the great figures who created and led them. The first movement was the Renaissance, where new art and ideas were widely circulated in Italy and then in other parts of Europe. It resulted partly from a rediscovery of the ideas of antiquity, derived from rediscovered records. Manchester scorns the medieval and Renaissance Popes but credits them for supporting the arts. The next movement was that of Renaissance humanism, with many great intellectuals educated themselves in the classic works of the ancient world. This led them to a new respect for reason and, despite the fact that many were devout Christians, their love of reason would ultimately be Christendom's undoing. The next movement was the Protestant Reformation which, while savage and dogmatic in its own ways, destroyed the grip the Catholic Church had on Europe and helped create the nation-state system.

One of the main currents of thought that changed the world is most discussed in Chapter III, *One Man Alone*. The exploration of the world brought many new ideas to Europe, most important of which were the many bits of evidence that they were not the pinnacle of civilization and that societies could flourish apart from the Christian religion. The greatest of these explorers was Magellan, whose voyage (that he himself did not complete) proved that the earth was round and that vast stretches of land and peoples existed that were in direct contradiction to the understanding of Christianity that prevailed at the time. This was the body blow to medieval Christendom and the birth pangs of the glorious, secular modern world.



Chapter I, The Medieval Mind

Chapter I, The Medieval Mind Summary and Analysis

William Manchester, the popular historical author and biographer, sets out a depiction of the demise of the medieval world and the rise of the Renaissance in three parts. Part I, "The Medieval Mind" provides a quick and highly polemical characterization of the medieval period that does not line up with contemporary historical opinion of its day. The chapter begins with Manchester emphasizing that the period between 400 A.D. and 1400 A.D. should still be called the "Dark Ages" despite the fact that historians have set aside this term for decades. It was a miserable, squalid time. The Roman Empire had fallen, destroying by barbarian tribes who would rule for forty generations.

The Dark Ages represented a stark decline in standards of living, with peasants struck constantly by famines, plague, the Black Death, and tumultuous climatic changes. Criminal justice for murder was almost nonexistence, violence was incredibly high. Monks and missionaries found it impossible to teach anyone the lessons of Jesus, as the presence of violence was universal. No one really understood their faith and pagan cults, though they went in hiding, were still entrenched. Christians disagreed about everything, which on the author's view makes sense given that the Gospels themselves contradict one another. Manchester pins much of the cultural cast of the Medieval period on Saint Augustine who invented the horrible doctrine of original sin and created a rationale for theocracy and the persecution of heretics. He also distinguished Christianity from pagan groups by its restrictive sexual morality, forcing men to be faithful to their wives, which made the faith appealing to women.

The Christian Church fostered its own set of conflicts, first between itself and various monarchs. These two sources of power fought over whether kings had the authority to institute bishops. During the "medieval millennium," the life of almost every person was governed by the Church, pope and priest. Christianity was nonetheless infiltrated by paganism and idol worship resumed after early Christians resisted it. The Church did its best to co-opt Pagan practices, buildings, rites and holidays.

The Medieval world was not a civilization, but a pathetic shadow of the Roman Empire. It had no real trade or reliable travel. The creative and the intellectuals suffered greatly. Europe was ruled by the noble and the regal, by privileged classes whose titles evolved but did not substantially change. Hereditary monarchy was largely a medieval invention. The Papacy played king-maker. It inflicted a great wound on itself in 1305, however, when the papacy was moved to Avignon. Soon thereafter the Papacy split. But this did not undermine Papal authority for the European peasant did not doubt and had no skepticism. The faithless was damned and the people and the church were resistant to change, with the Vatican saying it was immune to error and incapable of reform.

The medieval man had no true ego, no sense of self. Persons knew so little of time and place that when peasants were taken into armies they often could not find their way

home. Hamlets were inbred and isolated and all publications were in Latin. The village priest knew nothing. The people were even indifferent to privacy. And this occurred all the while the Papacy became more powerful through apologists like Aquinas and its own proclamations of its supremacy.

Nonetheless, by 1500, the major medieval institutions were dying. The knighthood was dying to new military technologies like the longbow. The Spanish monarchy had formed and was conquering the new world. New military organization created a dynamic of the centralization of power and new nation-states threatened monolithic Christendom. New educated classes were anticlerical and were disgusted by priestly misconduct. Theological and philosophical harmony was shattered in part by the philosophical doctrine of nominalism, which rejected the idea of real universals. This created a gulf between reason and revelation. But most of all, the full cultural heritage of Greece and Rome reappeared. In this environment, the Renaissance began. An unpredicted revolution would sweep up Europe through a plethora of "dragons" or great men, including Gutenberg, Erasmus, Luther, and many others. But most of all, the "fearsome" Ferdinand Magellan.



Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 1-11)

Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 1-11) Summary and Analysis

The author self-consciously adopts the historiography of Dark Ages vs. Rebirth or Renaissance. He also embraces a "great man" theory of history where the world was changed by extraordinary elites, some good and some evil. Chapter II reviews this litany of characters and attempts to explain how they "shatter" the medieval mind.

Manchester begins by discussing Ferdinand Magellan, the mightiest explorer in history who changed the maps of the West forever. His achievements were slighted, as he died on the way around the world in the Philippines. And he was not honored in his own time. He was nonetheless a linchpin for the Renaissance who challenged medieval assumptions with a new perspective. One would think that this new discovery would have quieted European barbarism but it did not. Torquemada ran the brutal Inquisition, persecuting Muslims and Jews. Jews were only luckier than blacks, who began to be traded as slaves by the millions. The Spanish Court was violent, as were many other elites. The biggest enemy of freedom in Europe at the time was the Pope. Popes were at their least devout and most corrupt, selling pardons. This was the time of the Borgia Popes, like Alexander, who sanctioned violence and homicide and who suppressed books critical of the Papacy.

The purity of Christ's teachings had been contaminated by popularity. Evangelists spread the Christian message but the philanthropy they encouraged went to sustain a massive church bureaucracy which moved money up the ladder and helped Popes gain power to collaborate with secular rulers. The first Popes withdrew from the world but now they were nobility, full of riches, replete with nepotism and without piety. They were remembered primarily for their corruption and brutal politics. During this time, reform movements began.

During the late medieval period, there were only 73 million people in Europe, a tenth of the population in the early 1990s. Twenty million lived in the Holy Roman Empire. Most people lived in small villages and hamlets. The entire family worked while knights lived in their castles and manorial houses. Even the prosperous peasant had little. His house was filled with vermin and lacked privacy. People suffered famine on average once every four years. People were small, with men just over five feet tall and 135 pounds.

Nonetheless, a new social civility was reemerging and the very idea of learning was being rediscovered. Arithmetic, spectacles, pencils, postal services, table manners, and cutlery were all on the rise. But with it a new piety arose, with fasts, sharp punishments for sins from priests, forced pilgrimages as alternatives to prison. Many pilgrims suffered terrible ordeals. Medieval Europeans did not know the Gospels or the Bible. They

believed the air was filled with spirits and that astrologers could divine one's fortune from the stars. Even such luminaries as Erasmus and Thomas More believed in witchcraft and the church hierarchy affirmed the existence of special miracles.



Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 12-23)

Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 12-23) Summary and Analysis

At the beginning of the Renaissance travel was slow and dangerous. Weather was harsh, roads were terrible, and highwaymen were everywhere and were seldom pursued. Greed ruled everyone and only the heavily armed could trade. Many legends and fairy tales were created, but none of them reflected the harsh realities of medieval life save in indirect and underemphasized ways.

Sexual morality had fallen to pieces. In the early 16th century, marriages were increasingly unarranged. It was hard for couples to maintain chastity until after their marriages. Women felt that they had to marry to be of any worth at all, so they often deliberately became pregnant so as to guarantee marriage. Once couples were engaged, they could sleep together. Being a prostitute could be prestigious. Bohemian artists scorned monogamy and elites supported them, often engaging in seduction without conscience. Sodomy was everywhere and adultery universal. Among the greatest examples of the unchaste were many noblemen and kings. As the medieval world declined sexual immorality increased substantially. And family ties loosened. It would not be until the rise of Protestantism that sexual morality would become more restrictive.

The Papacy was at its most corrupt. The Borgia Popes were notorious for their sexual immorality, starting with Rodrigo Lanzol y Borgia, who became Pope Calixtus III in 1456. He slept with a large succession of women, having a son and two daughters while Pope. And the next Pope, Alexander VI, had wild Vatican parties that often degraded into orgies. The Pope's child in 1480, the beautiful Vannozzadei Catanei, became legendary for her sexuality and her ability to use it to her own gain. Her brother, Cesare Borgia (1475-1507) was a multiple murderer and was the model of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Italian arts flourished during this time despite the corruption. The corrupt elites of Italy and Florence in particular admired the great Italian artists like Michelangelo. They often used artistic genius to glorify themselves and so supported it. The men of genius made the best of it.

The vigor of the new age did not spread everywhere. Music was still backward, despite the fact that the beautiful venues of the great European cathedrals were finally available. The cathedrals were culminations of dreams of other times. Their day was ending, due partly to the rise of Mikolaj Kopernik, a Polish physician and astronomer, popularly known as Copernicus. He taught that the world was moving and initially Pope Leo X helped him along, despite the fact that other Christians condemned his teachings (like Martin Luther and John Calvin). Popes following Copernicus would condemn his teachings and his books would be banned by the Catholic Church until 1828.



Manchester's next "dragon" of the Renaissance was Leonardo de Vinci (1452-1519) who was the greatest creative figure of the era. He threatened the certitude of the "Age of Faith." Skepticism was quashed by the Papacy's ability to inspire absolute terror of the depths of hell. But Da Vinci probed endlessly the depths of human ingenuity. Manchester paints Da Vinci as fighting against Christianity, which kept men ignorant. Da Vinci flouted taboos, even dissecting cadavers to write his book on human anatomy. The new Pope, Leo X, would ultimately accept the popular smears of him. He refused to support Da Vinci and fortunately for him the French King, Francis I, hired him as the court architect and engineer. Da Vinci spent the last year of his life on canal design.

The medieval period was an era of intellectual suffocation. But learning and literature was reborn with the typographical revolution begun by Johannes Gutenberg who mass produced the first Bible with movable type from 1457 to 1458. Some denounced the printing press as dangerous but the utility of the press drew in businessmen and new reading publics. Illiteracy fell. Before only elites could reliably read, but as time progressed authors wrote in the vernacular and illiteracy fell.



Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 24-34)

Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 24-34) Summary and Analysis

Once the printing press was created, the reading public expanded. There were many cheap avenues of instruction. As free opinion broke out, the Papacy issued several futile bulls trying to restrict what people could read, but individuality had broken out and many great works survived. Even Catholic theologians became fluent in classical tongues and writers would write in the vernacular.

New universities sprouted up all over Europe. In this new system, genuine learning flourished and many men became autodidacts, self-taught readers. While many theology programs were corrupted by Scholastic and ecclesiological obsessions, others turned to actually learning ancient languages, like a more accurate form of Latin. The great success of the Renaissance, in Manchester's view, was to awaken Europe's ties to antiquity. The Renaissance man became a universal ideal for men of letters. They were no longer confined to theology, but were to know about all things.

It was the day of Renaissance humanism, an intellectual movement that held that the humanities were the most important domains of learning, far superior to theology. Humanism was one of the few intellectual movements that changed both university curricula and civilization itself. Humanists became honored as nobility for their accomplishments. Sir Thomas More was among the great humanists until his fall from grace in the court of King Henry VIII. He was benevolent in some respects but held the same savagery within them characteristic of medieval times. More was a Star Chamber prosecutor and a rigid Catholic who believed in executing heretics. Like many humanists, he was loyal to Rome despite the fact that skepticism and sacrilege was starting to catch on.

Initially the Vatican was friendly to the Renaissance but humanists raised two threats. First, they celebrated reason, which is incompatible with faith, in Manchester's view. Second, Christianity was always focused on eternal life, not the here and now. Humanism promised people the ability to enjoy their present lives. People could grasp the nature of their universe today.

The conceptual clash between humanism and Christianity was not immediate. Initially humanism and theology seemed opposed only in emphasis. But the humanist pursuit of reason led them to be critical of Rome's corrupt abuses of authority. Many humanists found the idea of criticizing Rome disturbing. They looked for compromises. Catholic intellectuals were torn between faith and reason. But people like Galileo kept coming on the scene, challenging faith. Faith had held Europe together in a time of great

impoverishment and the Church, for better or worse, quieted feuding princes. With the demise of Church power, the pious would see the collapse of social stability.

Manchester's case in point was the great humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam, an orthodox Catholic and frequent guest at the College of Cardinals. Erasmus always sought patient compromise. He nonetheless hated to live under the threat of censure, so at Henry VIII's invitation, he left Rome for England for intellectual freedom. Erasmus's at first highly intellectual attempts to reform Catholicism fell on deaf ears. But he had the ability to make men laugh through satire. His *Praise of Folly* was an astonishing hit with the reading public and sold widely. The book enraged the priesthood and savaged Julius II, the "warrior Pope." While Erasmus wrote pseudonymously, he was eventually exposed in part due to an accidental slip from his friend Thomas More.



Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 35-45)

Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 35-45) Summary and Analysis

But humanism was not the only force that threatened to undermine the medieval world. What Manchester calls the "Great Apostasy" was the Protestant Reformation. There were other currents of thought that arose from the recent rediscovery that the arts flourished before Jesus and the grappling with the fact that Constantinople had fallen. Trade with the East had brought in new information and the clergy themselves were quite critical of abuses. Celibacy restrictions were increasingly disobeyed and the pontiffs set poor examples.

Four years before the Reformation began, the Catholic Church began to sell indulgences to an unprecedented extent. Tickets to get loved ones out of purgatory, poor people would spend fortunes in an attempt to aid those they believed suffered beyond the grave. This turned the Church into a money machine and continued to enable Popes to live like Roman Emperors. The Vatican remained unmoved by its own corruption and even commissioned Johann Tetzel, a "medieval P.T. Barnum" to collect fees for indulgences across the German countryside. Frederick the Wise, one of the electors of Germany (the elector of Saxony specifically) thought the sale of indulgences was an affront to good order, redistributing money from Germany to Rome. His prized theologian, Martin Luther, was similarly disgusted when he judged the indulgences to be inauthentic frauds. When Tetzel heard of Luther, he decided to try to intimidate him by formally denouncing him. This was the most famous misjudgment of Luther and it kicked off the ultimate unraveling of the medieval world.

Luther was a professor of philosophy and theology in Wittenberg. He single-handedly translated the Bible into High German, a language he practically invented. While his loyalty to the Vatican was total in his early years, he had a "half-mad" impulse within him that was the result of a terrifying "Teutonic childhood" begun in 1483. Luther never shed his pagan superstitions and claimed to actually see the devil. He was excessively focused on the anal in life, especially on the use of feces. However, his genius dazzled his colleagues and his revolutionary teaching of justification by faith alone would change the world. On October 31st, 1517, Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Wittenberg chapel door, challenging Tetzel directly and claiming that the Pope should, out of mercy, release all souls from purgatory for free if he was willing to do so for money. While the event was not dramatic in itself, its timing was perfect, given the socio-political climate of Europe at that time.

After his challenge to Tetzel, the sale of indulgences plunged and Tetzel was finished. Luther became famous and eventually dared to challenge the Pope himself, which Manchester describes as "the ruler of the universe." Luther would break the damn of



medieval discipline by claiming that each man could be his own priest. Due in part to his translations of the Bible, people learned that Christ slept with the oppressed and not the rich. And Luther was also fortunate to speak in favor of Germany's economic interests, as the sale of indulgences was sapping them dry. As Luther became more bold, he denounced Scholastic doctrines and more traditional theological views. Leo X could not ignore Luther, as the German Catholic clergy were closing ranks to oppose him, among them Dr. Johann Eck and Cardinal Cajetan, the general of the Dominicans. Luther would not retract his views, however often he was challenged. And he denied invitations to Rome, for (plausibly) fearing that he would be burned at the stake. The Reformation took a more radical turn when Eck, in public debate, got Luther to admit that the Council of Constance should not have executed Jan Hus, a Bohemian Reformer, for heresy which led him to say that ecumenical councils could err. This led Luther to directly challenge Papal authority.

At the time, Leo X was more focused on determining who the new Holy Roman Emperor would be. He had very poor judgment and it would be the undoing of the church. The message of Wittenberg was spreading and Leo X needed Frederick the Wise's political aid, so Luther was safe for the time being. Eventually Carlos I of Spain was elected Emperor Charles V. The reformation expanded and enlisted in their ranks a number of angry intellectuals. Luther began to claim that the Papacy was the devil's church and Leo could no longer tolerate him. He issued a Papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, condemning Luther's teachings. When Luther refused to recant, he was excommunicated. The Papacy only stopped short of eternally damning Luther. But Christians were forbidden to listen to him and he had become a legal fugitive. He responded with new pamphlets and a public burning of the Papal Bull. This was a capital offense, but Luther contended, on good legal grounds, that the bull had yet to go into effect and was therefore illegal. Luther would survive longer because he had filled the political vacuum left by the deteriorating Holy Roman Empire. Nobles wanted to resist control by the church. The result would be the rise of modern nation-states.



Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 46-56)

Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 46-56) Summary and Analysis

The Catholic response to Luther was to distribute the Papal Bulls condemning him, which was carried out by the papal legates Johann Eck and Hieronymus Aleandro. They meant to make Luther a pariah but their efforts had the opposite effect in Germany. Many Germans were eager to be free from Rome and Luther had many supporters. Eck and Aleandro had to move carefully, less they be assaulted by mobs. Their posters of the bull were torn down even in Catholic strongholds. Luther was content in 1520, writing in German violent condemnations of the pope and Catholic doctrines.

Humanists and Catholics had attacked vernacular writers but Luther knew that few could read their tracts, as they were in Latin. Many of the princes could not read Latin. But they all knew simple German. So Luther's works *Of the Freedom of the Christian* and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* was very popular and widely read and discussed. Luther's condemnations were absolute and appealed to German patriotism and their economic interests, pointing out that the Pope was exploiting them. The Pope was a robber and papal legates should be expelled and a national church established ruled by the Archbishop of Mainz. Luther had gone into utterly new theological territory. He tried communicating with the Pope but was unsuccessful. Aleandro appealed to Frederick the Wise and even Erasmus as to whether Luther should be arrested, but they refused. Luther was to remain free while appealing the bull.

Luther was eventually tried before the Diet of Worms in January 1521. The Diet included enormous ranks of nobility and priests, with dukes, bishops and the Holy Roman Emperor in attendance. The German nobles, to Charles V's surprise, supported Luther as did many others. All men were dressed regally, save Luther who commanded authority in his simple robes. He was given a day to recant but refused, famously claiming that "Here I stand. I can do no other." He argued that people had the authority to interpret Scripture for themselves. He claimed that the popes and councils contradicted one another. Charles V decided to treat him as a heretic but only four of the German electors agreed, so he could not legally move forward. Frederick the Wise then had Luther taken into hiding in the Wartburg Castle where he translated the entire Bible into German. All the while Charles became distracted by a coming war with France. Charles's failure to suppress Luther would lead to the death of medieval Christendom.

In Luther's absence, revolution erupted across Europe and he won many converts, including the sister of Charles. He was supported primarily by tradesmen, anti-clericals, the middle classes and the German nobility. The economic incentive to agree with him was massive as the papacy had extracted great wealth from Germany. But there was no



birth of religious freedom here. Protestants disagreed violently and attacked one another. While they shared some common principles, they were all repressive and had some vicious doctrines like an uncompromising belief in predestination. Groups of Lutherans and Reformed Christians soon coalesced into distinct groups. Zwingli and Calvin and Knox arose with their own views and were all repressive. Over a quarter of a million people died as a result. But this was not all due to religion, but due to the previous repression of homicidal lust. Luther was eventually drawn out of hiding as a result and wanted people to be able to make their own choices. Despite this Thomas Muntzer, once his allies, had become a radical Anabaptist and lead 100000 peasants in a rebellion that led them all to be brutally slaughtered, including Muntzer.

Afterwards, Luther and Erasmus began an increasingly complex relationship. Their dispositions were diametrically opposed, with Luther intuitive and Erasmus rational, Luther angry and emotional, Erasmus cool and measured. But Erasmus still defended Luther and Lutherans as seeking the truth. Exsurge Domine was a mistake. But both men misjudged the other. Luther's followers were often anti-humanists and the humanists saw the Protestants as attempting a reactionary, superstitious return to medievalism. Eventually Luther criticized Erasmus and Erasmus continually overestimated the power of logic. But many Catholics still blamed him for Luther's defection and came to distrust him. Eventually he went to Switzerland, to escape potential persecutor. He later had to move to Austria for the same reasons. But he never had real peace, dying a martyr to the emotional, irrational forces he despised. The future was not kind to him. After he died, he was ex-communicated as a heretic and Pope Paul IV banned his writings from Catholics. He was the most eminent intellectual victim of the Reformation but he was not alone. Lefevre in France and Ulrich von Hutten in Germany were great men of learning who died with similar fates and with hideous deaths.

The Protestant regimes that arose became stiffly doctrinal, more so even than in Rome. John Calvin's Geneva was the worst with incredibly stringent regulations covering almost all of life's activities. And they defended their use of force to impose their views on the grounds that the papacy was ready to use such means against them. Heresy was treated as the worst of all crimes.



Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 57-64)

Chapter II, The Shattering (Sections 57-64) Summary and Analysis

Pope Leo did not really grasp what was going on beneath his watch. He conceived of the early elements of the Reformation as a "squabble among monks." Religion just wasn't a great priority for him, as he cared more about learning, living the good life and making war. Focusing on conquering France to expand Northern Italy would cost him Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia to Protestants. Leo died at 46, one random night. The next Pope, Adrian VI, was a reformer and focused on heresy and abuse. He ended simony and the sale of indulgences. But he died after a year.

Next came Pope Clement VII, whose inability to play the political game led to a sacking of Rome by Charles V's mutinying troops. Millions were stolen and many sacred places desecrated. Protestants saw it as divine retribution and some Catholics agreed. But most Catholics blamed Protestant heretics for the soldiers' rage and disobedience. Now when Protestants upped the ante, Catholics would respond in kind. At the same time, Catholics urged reforms to stop people leaving the church for Protestantism. It would use military and political action as its primary means, however. Jews were attacked and blamed for these matters too. Every aspect of Protestantism would be condemned in bulls, but the rebel faiths did well. The Roman Inquisition was far worse than the Spanish Inquisition. Heresy would not be tolerated on pain of death.

The English King Henry VIII remained the most loved sovereign in Rome but it felt it could not condemn his sexual misconduct. He was scripturally well-informed, having trained to be a priest. And he was an orthodox Catholic, condemning Luther at the same time. In response, Luther supported a Protestant sect in London which published Tyndale's famous English translation of the New Testament. Tyndale was a humanist and the humanists initially loved Henry VIII for his extraordinary learning. But Henry seemed to be a reactionary Catholic, not a true lover of wisdom. He would ultimately have Tyndale executed and his corpse burned. But Tyndale's translation would become the basis of the world famous King James version of the Bible. Henry had resisted any hint of Lutheranism and other heresies. Rome appreciated it and named Henry Defender of the Faith which he put on all coins.

And yet Henry VIII and Luther are both seen as fathers of the Reformation, despite the fact that they would have hated the comparison. Luther was theologically innovative. Henry remained Catholic in every respect save one. He rejected the supremacy of the pope because the pope would not grant him a divorce from Queen Catherine of Aragon. He was expected to sire a son. Without one, the only recently settled Wars of the Roses over monarchical succession could repeat itself and tear England apart. His only daughter would be wedded to the next French King. Without an heir, England would



soon become a province of France. The oddity was that Papal dispensations were not uncommon. But Pope Clement did not want to give any public appearance of corruption given the recent sack of Rome. Plus, Queen Catherine was Charles V's aunt and he was enraged at the idea of a divorce. Henry's infatuation with Anne Boleyn pushed him over the top, given her lasciviousness. Henry would have found a new queen anyway but she was still the catalyst. But Clement was in a political bind and Henry's dispensation was denied.

In 1533 Henry had had enough and married Anne. He was summarily excommunicated. Parliament passed the Act of Succession in 1534, permitting the divorce. Questioning the new marriage became a capital crime. Henry then made Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury and gave him great power. Cranmer proclaimed that the Pope was incompetent to give the dispensation and affirmed Henry's choice of wife. Despite the opposition of Sir Thomas More, the new high chancellor, Henry limited clerical power and increased tax on the church, which incensed Rome. All revenues to Rome were ended, all Church lands were confiscated (20% of the land in England). English Christians must now submit to the Crown and the Archbishop. More remained loyal to Rome but stayed mute, which was devastating to Henry given More's prominence. At his trial, More spoke out against the King for committing a tragic crime against the Catholic Church. He would later be beheaded. England was stunned and Erasmus mourned his friend. The Vatican made him a Christian martyr, beatifying and canonizing him.

The demise of Anne Boleyn would follow soon thereafter, given what was regarded as outrageous behavior. She was beheaded. Eventually Mary, the later notoriously bloody Mary Queen of Scots, would take revenge on her mother Catherine's betrayers. Edward VI, the son of Jane Seymour, came into the line of succession but Mary, who had been declared illegitimate, was restored for complex reasons. Mary tried hard to destroy the Reformation in England but it could not be done. Archbishop Cranmer was burned at the stake by her hand. The redemptive ruler would be the daughter of Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth, one of the greatest sovereigns in English and indeed perhaps world history. While she had been declared illegitimate, she was restored to the regal line on the same grounds as Mary. In 1558, at twenty-five, Elizabeth I restored Protestantism and ruled England for forty-five years. In light of her parents' sexual excesses, she remained a virgin to set an example.

With this, Manchester ends the long Chapter II, the Shattering. The combination of the Renaissance, humanism, and the Continental and English Reformations had torn medieval Christendom end from end. The Western world was now comprised of many powerful nation-states that would modernize.



Chapter III, One Man Alone (Sections 1-15)

Chapter III, One Man Alone (Sections 1-15) Summary and Analysis

Chapter III turns to Manchester's hero: Ferdinand Magellan, Capitan-General of his fleet of five ships that attempted to go around the world: the San Antonio, the Trinidad, the Concepcion, the Victoria and the Santiago. It was the great seaworthy Armada de Molucca. Magellan would not survive the journey, which would take three years. Magellan was a small man from a lower part of the Portuguese social order, but he had enormous confidence and vision. He was a dreamer, enthralled by the idea of adventure and who believed that he could become a hero himself. Magellan was not a man who could accept defeat and his strong character often cost him support from others.

When Magellan set sea, the medieval world was already on the decline, though Magellan would not be away of it. Michelangelo had finished the Sistine Chapel, the Reformation was just about to begin. Manchester canvasses many of the social changes he documented in Chapters I and II but adds discussions of the growth of commerce and the middle and merchant classes. He claims that secularism spread with literacy which also discredited customary religion. But Magellan would put the stake in the coffin of the medieval world by opening it up, by showing the world who peoples who had never heard of Christ and were none the worse for it.

The reader should observe here that Manchester admires Magellan and largely because he believes that Magellan was a central force in the destruction of Christendom, despite his deep Catholic piety. The new geography would render the literal interpretation of the Bible absurd. For a long time the medieval relied on Greek and Roman astronomy and geography, that placed the Earth at the center of the universe. Many believed in superstition, thinking that monsters lurked far away. But a few adventurous people had begun to explore the world if only for economic reasons. The Atlantic beckoned Europeans as Middle East trade routes were expensive.

Manchester reviews the history of early exploration and the records that derived from them. The maps were inexact and did not have the benefit of tools of navigation. Most of the exploration was conducted by Portugal and Spain through initially modest and careful voyagers. But eventually the Spanish and Portuguese began to compete over claims to new land and trade routes. The Portuguese made the spectacular discovery of a trade route to India going about the Middle East. But they realized slowly throughout the 1490s, 1500s and 1510s that many of their explorers were not in Asia at all, but somewhere new. The Caribbean Islands were discovered as was Florida and the East Coast of South America. They found the Aztecs, among other American civilizations. And eventually Vasco de Balboa would see the Pacific. The Portuguese and Spanish



competed over the relevant land claims. Portugal for a time got ahead of Spain and Spain sulked. But Magellan saw the competition as an opportunity.

Magellan knew an enormous amount about travel through his contacts and his own experiences. He had been a Portuguese soldier and had experienced combat at sea. But he became disillusioned with the Portuguese and appealed to the Spanish Crown for support. He offered Spain the opportunity to make new land claims and to wrest the Spice Islands from the Portuguese. All he needed was funding. While many asked the Spanish Crown for money, Magellan impressed them most due to his incredibly confident (not his charm). He was positive the islands belonged to Spain under the new maritime rules of discovery (he was incorrect about this).

So Spain agreed to fund him and he was initially excited until a Portuguese Consul, Sebastian Alvarez, began to spread rumors about him which made recruiting sailors difficult. After appealing to the Spanish King again for funds, he set sail on September 20th, 1519. He had with him a number of aristocrats, specifically Castilian dons, who wanted to mutiny. After the first ten weeks they arrived in Brazil near present-day Rio. But while sailing along the coast, they found no passage across South America as they had been told to expect by Magellan's contacts. As they approached the South Pole, the weather got worse. The pass was illusive. While they holed up for the winter, a number of the dons mutinied and briefly overthrew Magellan until he eventually won the crews back over. But the conflict proved costly and Magellan's costs would now have to be recouped in some other way, perhaps by becoming a conqueror. By this time, Magellan had been at sea a year and had travelled nine-thousand miles. He had explored but found nothing. On October 18th, 1520, he was only 150 miles away from one of his greatest discoveries.



Chapter III, One Man Alone (Sections 16-25)

Chapter III, One Man Alone (Sections 16-25) Summary and Analysis

On Sunday, October 21st, 1520, Magellan's men first found evidence of a Southern pass, which gradually came into view over the course of five days. After a month around South America, they all believed they had found the pass. The question was now whether to sail home and go to the Spice Islands. Their supplies were running low; many thought they should return. Magellan would have done well to heed the advice to turn back but he ignored it. As a result of disagreement, two of his ships abandoned him, further reducing his supplies but he still stayed the course. When Magellan first saw the wide open Pacific Ocean he burst into tears.

The three ships would then cross the Pacific over 12,600 miles. They had no maps, poor navigating instruments and no idea where they were. They sailed on from November to March, slowly moving north-westward. For six months, they did not see another soul. Magellan had vastly underestimated the size of the Pacific. They ran out of food, having to eat rats and leather. Nineteen men died. Scurvy afflicted the rest. On March 6th, 1521, they landed in Guam, then nameless. After three days rest, they pressed on, finding the large Philippine island of Samar on March 16th. The Spice Islands were still a thousand miles away. Natives provided them with food. They now knew they were on their way home and had proven the world was a sphere.

The men, mostly young, had been without female companionship for a year. And the local women only wore clothes once they were married. The sailors went after them and had a large amount of what was, apparently, voluntary sex. The Filipino men began to resent them but Magellan's mind was on other matters. He had come down with a religious fever, wanting to convert the Filipino to Christianity and bring them under Spanish sovereignty. His priest ran an Easter Mass and on Magellan's orders had many of the Filipino leaders baptized. Twenty-two hundred people converted, and Magellan saw this as a great accomplishment. Oddly, Magellan had prayed over a dying Filipino man and he had miraculously recovered from a great sickness which had a gigantic effect on the Filipinos and his officers. The natives converted and the officers worried.

The officers had a council and wanted to leave immediately, as they had departed from their main mission, but Magellan disagreed, wanting to assure that the Philippines were loyal to Spain. Shockingly, Magellan had, in this vein, promised to make the local chief's enemies Spain's enemies. In this case, the local chief's enemy was a tribal leader named Lapulapu. Magellan would lead a war party against them, believing himself invulnerable. Magellan was everything he had never been - reckless and careless and forgetful. But he lacked cover fire and picked men poorly, using mass amounts of natives who had primitive weapons. He took only sixty men to show that Christian



soldiers could win against incredible odds. The men faced terrible misfortunes, even getting stuck in water with heavy armor. Their party was eventually cut off from behind and many were speared to death. Magellan paid the ultimate price for leaving his better men behind. While he survived being hit with arrows and even a spear to his face, he still died. The enemy troops tore his body to pieces.

While Magellan's life had ended, his voyage did not. After the memorial service, the seaman continued to impregnate local women. The natives were disgusted and deconverted. A few of the Spaniards had been invited to dine with local leaders and were slain. The rest got on their ships and sailed away. On November 6th, 1521, the Victoria reached the Moluccas and was joined by the Trinidad. The Trinidad would sink soon thereafter. The Victoria, still fit, sailed home with twenty-six tons of spices. Her captain, Juan Sebastian del Cano, helped lead the mutiny against Magellan only a year ago. But he handled the voyage superbly. They crossed charted water. They had traveled 17,800 miles from the Filipines, traveling 39,300 miles in all and their ship was falling apart. The crew was reduced to eighteen starved men from the 265 men who had left Spain three years before. On September 8th, 1522, they reached Seville, home. They were hailed as heroes, having been long lost. Charles V (King of Spain before) returned from the disaster with Luther at the Diet of Wurms to greet the captain. Juan Sebastian del Cano would be canonized after he died. Charles V knighted him. Magellan, sadly was spoken of with disdain. None of his beneficiaries from his will were among those who supported him. Cano could manipulate history and distort the record of the world's greatest explorer.

Magellan's legacy would be extraordinary however. The Magellanic Clouds, who parts of galaxies, were named for him. His gift of the Madonna and child statue to the Filipinos would eventually affect 60 million of their 80 million people who were all Catholic. He was not the most wise and gifted man of his time. But he was "the era's greatest hero." While he died in a strange and shameful way, he was a hero for acting alone without encouragement, relying on his own conviction. He had little external incentive but was driven only by his dream. His character was imperfect but he achieved greatness.

Only centuries later would Magellan's accomplishment be fully appreciated. None of the great geographers anticipated his discovery. But they concluded that Copernicus had been right. The earth rolled eastward on its own axis. Magellan could not savor the moment but he had confirmed a new conception of the earth. This was a "decisive blow" to the "dead past." The authority of the Bible now had a crack in it and the Papacy contradicted. His achievement could not be denied. He had weakened the certitude of elite Christians. Even though today there are over a billion Christians, no serious faith can be had in the Christian God. Skepticism haunts all churches and people must persuade themselves to believe. They must suppress doubt and secular society makes that difficult. The sense of loss of medieval faith is forever destroyed.



Characters

Ferdinand Magellan

Ferdinand Magellan (1480 - 1521) led the first sea expedition to circumnavigate the globe. A Portuguese explorer, Magellan would come to serve King Charles I of Spain in order to find a Western passage to the "Spice Islands" (now called the Maluku Islands). His famed three year voyage was also the first to travel from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. While Magellan died at the Battle of Mactan in the Philippines, his crewmen finished the journey without him.

Magellan is the hero of *A World Lit Only By Fire*. Manchester glorifies him enormously, crediting him with fundamentally destroying the "medieval world." Magellan had a number of incredible qualities. He knew his craft extremely well, he was an effective leader and extremely confident. But most of all, he was an extraordinary dreamer who read about those he admired and strove to imitate them. This led him on an epic quest. He was also careful and methodical and planned. The problem with Magellan was that he eventually abandoned his strengths after barely surviving the passage through the Pacific led him to become a religious zealot who believed God had made him invincible. As a result, he died a brutal death and could not see his dream to completion. But his ultimate significance was to show that indeed the world was round and that it was full of peoples that flourished outside of Christendom. Manchester therefore credits him with proving that the geography in the Bible was incorrect, therefore dealing a crushing blow to Christian belief.

Desiderius Erasmus

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), also known as Erasmus of Rotterdam, is Manchester's ideal Renaissance humanist. He was also a Catholic priest and a theologian. Erasmus was known across Europe for his great learning. He was a scholar of antiquity who helped Europe to recover the lost literature of the ancient world. Given Erasmus's deep piety, he was deeply concerned about the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church. So much so that he left Rome for fear of censorship due to the corruption he perceived at the time. When he reached England at the behest of King Henry VIII, he wrote a number of great satires of institutions of his day, most famously *The Praise of Folly*, which savaged the Catholic hierarchy.

Manchester celebrates Erasmus for being level-headed, intellectual and fair. Erasmus was friendly to the Protestant Reformers though he could not join them. Not only did he feel loyal to Rome, however corrupt it was, but he rejected early Protestant criticisms of the doctrine of free will and their belief in predestination. Given his unwillingness to clearly take sides, he was criticized fiercely by both Protestants and Catholics. Manchester most admires Erasmus for his loyalty to reason despite being completely surrounded by crazy, savage dogmatists. His measured and thoughtful care was unique



to the time period and was part of the spread of humanism that would prove so poisonous to Christian dogma.

Martin Luther

This is the founder of the Protestant Reformation who, in Manchester's eyes, set the social, political and spiritual wheels in motion that undid European Christendom by splitting the Western Church into pieces. While Manchester thought Luther a half-mad quasi-savage, he still sees him as a fundamentally positive historical force.

Sir Thomas More

An England Catholic and powerful parliamentarian, More was known for his extraordinary learning as one of the great humanists of the early modern period. He would die a martyr's death, however, when he refused to leave the Catholic Church under orders from his liege, King Henry VIII.

King Henry VIII

The originally deeply Roman Catholic English King and friend of Rome, Henry took England away from the Catholic Church when Pope Clement VII refused to grant him a divorce from his first wife, Queen Catherine.

Emperor Charles V

This is the young Holy Roman Emperor who defended the Catholic Church against the Reformation in an alliance with the Papacy but who was sufficiently distracted with political and military matters that the Reformation grew out of his control.

The Borgia Popes

The Italian House of Borgia produced a number of Popes who were the most corrupt in the entire history of the Roman Catholic Church. However, they were great supporters of Italian arts.

Pope Leo X

This was the great Pope during the Reformation who was not especially focused on promoting the Christian faith and who failed to recognize the significance of the Reformation as it arose.



Pope Clement VII

The weak and indecisive Pope who refused to grant Henry VIII's divorce request and who thereby, indirectly, led to the English Reformation.

Leonardo da Vinci

He was one of the greatest minds in history, according to Manchester. His fearless curiosity and love of reason helped to create modern science, modern art, and modern skepticism of religion.

Michelangelo

He was the great Italian artist whose works were among the cultural high points of the Renaissance.

Copernicus

He was the Polish astronomer who first taught that the earth was not the center of the universe.



Objects/Places

The Medieval Mind

Manchester saw the medieval mind as backward, superstitious, anti-intellectual, and violent. He is happy to tell the story of its demise.

Christendom

The heart of the Christian West in Europe that the Renaissance helped to destroy.

Rome

The old capital of the Roman Empire and seat of the Roman Catholic Church. It is the setting of many of the events described in the book.

Western Europe

The geographical territory where Christendom rose and fell.

The Papacy

The leading political institution in the Roman Catholic Church that once had incredibly political and spiritual control over Europe but whose power was increasingly broken over time.

Wittenberg

The home of Martin Luther and the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation.

The Armada de Molucca

The name of Magellan's set of five ships that he and his men would take around the globe.

The Printing Press

Invented by Gutenberg, the printing press helped to create modern literacy, which was one of many forces that undermined the hold that Christian dogma held over Europe.



Humanism

A set of cultural and educational activities and reforms that undermined medieval scholastic education and focused on the production of professionals like doctors and lawyers and theologians. They were famous for recovering the lost texts of antiquity and spreading a love of knowledge and learning. The humanists are among Manchester's great heroes.

Secularism

In Manchester's view, secularism is a doctrine skeptical of religious institutions and religious belief that he heralds as a positive force in destroying the backward medieval mind.

Protestantism

Refers to a set of doctrines that arose in the 16th century in response to the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Early Protestants demanded reform in the behavior and structure of European Christian institutions and taught the doctrine of justification by faith alone, among other views.

Christianity

The most populous world religion whose high point was during the medieval period and which Manchester was pleased to see lose its power over the minds of men, which he documents throughout the book.

The Renaissance

The period of cultural and intellectual rebirth in early modern Europe and that *A World Lit Only By Fire* is meant to herald.



Themes

The

Chapter I, The Medieval Mind, is most focused on reviving the oft-scorned term "the Dark Ages." For a long time over the last several centuries, it was commonplace to see the time period that last roughly from 400 A.D. to 1400 A.D. as a culturally backward and impoverished period of time. The rough social image is one of a declining Western civilization after the barbaric destruction and decay of the Roman Empire. It would not be until the rise of a number of social movements, the rediscovery of antiquity and the creation of modern science. Then the Western World would emerge from the darkness and enter the light through social periods like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

In more recent decades, historians have moved decisively away from the historiography that gave rise to the conception of the medieval world as "Dark." The term "middle ages" is universal among historians of the period and those who study the texts of the time in English and Philosophy departments among others. It is also common to distinguish the "High" middle ages for their cultural achievements. But to Manchester, this common academic view is not even worth addressing. To Manchester, the medieval period was so dark that the medieval world did not count as a civilization at all. This is a highly polemical and questionable view among historians. The reader should be wary of Manchester's historical competence as a result.

The Glorious Destruction of Christendom

A striking feature of *A World Lit Only By Fire* is its hostility to traditional Christianity. The author explicitly ties devout Christian belief to savagery, violence, superstition, oppression, inequality, impoverishment, anti-intellectualism and hostility to science. While the author does not attack Christianity directly, it is as close to direct as possible. Towards the end of Chapter III, the author actively celebrates Magellan's expedition for providing empirical proof that the world was round, which he takes to directly contradict the Bible (a position supported by no orthodox Christian church body today). As a result, Magellan put the final stake in the medieval world's coffin by making it impossible to read the Bible literally.

The oddity of attributing to Magellan, a devout Roman Catholic and later religious zealot (a fact not lost on Manchester), the destruction of medieval Christian Europe should strike any fair-minded reader. For Manchester however, to leave the Dark Ages the foundations of rational Christian belief had to be subjected to challenge. This meant challenging the Papacy via reform and Protestantism. It meant reviving antiquity, which showed that a non-Christian civilization could be culturally superior to Christendom. It also meant exploring the world to demonstrate that there were peoples who flourished without Christian belief. All of these factors, according to Manchester, led to what he



regards as a glorious destruction of a united Christendom. Thereafter, secularism would sweep Europe even if in private religious belief persisted.

Innovation, Art, and Exploration

While much of *A World Lit Only By Fire* is critical of medieval institutions, it celebrates a number of historical figures responsible for extraordinary innovation, art, and exploration. One point of Chapter II, *The Shattering*, is to provide brief biographical sketches of the great inventors, artists and explorers of the period. Manchester celebrates Michelangelo and the other Florentine artists of the Renaissance, pointing out that the arts flourished despite the great corruption among Italian and Catholic elites at the time. Leonardo Da Vinci is celebrated as well for his fearless desire to innovate. He would dissect cadavers in order to discover the nature of human anatomy despite the criticisms of those around him.

But most important to Manchester is the power of exploration. Given that Manchester is committed to showing how the medieval mind was destroyed, he must show how their conception of the world was threatened. There is no better and clearer way to do this than to attack the medieval conception of geography. From this point of view, distant lands were full of dragons and giants, the world was flat, and the people were barbaric. The great achievements of the Spanish and Portuguese explorers, despite their many vices and crimes, opened up the world and made it clear that the world was very different than even medieval elites had thought. This threatened their conception of the world at a fundamental level.

Style

Perspective

William Manchester (1922-2004) was a renowned American journalist and biographer. He wrote eighteen books over the course of his career and won the National Humanities Medal for his work. For much of his life, he was a journalist but he later became an academic via Wesleyan University. Manchester is best known for being commissioned in 1964 by the Kennedy family for writing an account of JFK's assassination. Manchester is also known for being heavily influenced by H.L. Mencken.

Manchester's perspective is characteristic of popular history of early to mid-twentieth century America. A standard view of the Middle Ages is that they were best described as "the Dark Ages" due to the fact that they were religiously homogeneous, ruled by the Roman Catholic Church, highly superstitious, violent, repressive, impoverish, and famished. Only with the rise of Protestantism, Humanism and other early modern ideologies was the back of medieval Christendom broken and a new age of economic growth, political freedom, religious pluralism, and secularism emerged. Consequently, Manchester is keen to impress upon the reader that Europe in the Dark Ages did not even constitute a civilization and that the real progress in history was the gradual destruction of sincere Christian belief, especially belief in the reliability of the Bible and the infallibility of the Papacy. It is worthy of note, however, that Manchester is particularly polemical given his ideological commitments.

Tone

A World Lit Only By Fire contains two primary tones depending on Manchester's topic. If Manchester is focused on describing the medieval mind, the power of the Papacy, the savagery of medieval peoples, anti-intellectualism and other bug-a-bears he is unusually critical and hostile. This part of the tone, of course, reflects his ideological commitments on these matters. But it is noteworthy how extreme his view is. As mentioned several times in this guide, Manchester is so hostile to the main features of the medieval mind and orthodox Christianity in general that he describes the "Dark Ages" as so backward that it cannot even be counted as a civilization, a wholly unserious historical perspective on the age.

When Manchester turns to those ideas, figures and movements that he likes, he champions them and speaks in flowing, effusive prose. For instance, Manchester is especially kind to Renaissance Humanists, praising them for their level-headed devotion to reason and love of classical antiquity. He is particularly positive when describing Ferdinand Magellan who is, to him, one of history's greatest heroes. Magellan's character was deeply admirable. Manchester sees him as having the sort of unusual quality of being ambitious and self-confident. He had a quintessentially heroic personality. While he may have been prone to various personality flaws, his



determination, courage and ambition made him great. In general, the tone of *A World Lit Only By Fire* contains this dual aspect, clearly positive and negative depending on the elements Manchester describes.

Structure

A World Lit Only By Fire is composed of three chapters, each of which are extended essays on topics related to the author's aim of giving a general characterization of the medieval mind and the historical transition via the Renaissance that undermined it. Chapter I, *The Medieval Mind*, is Manchester's attempt to give the reader a general explanation of the socio-economic nature of medieval Europe and the ideas that dominated. In brief, Manchester raises the unusual opinion that the "Dark Ages" were so backward that they cannot even count as a civilization. The medieval mind was dominated by superstition and hostility to reason.

In Chapter II, *The Shattering*, traces a number of intellectual movements that undermined or threatened the medieval mind in some way or another. The author focuses primarily on three major social movements. First, the Renaissance humanist recovery of the insights and texts of antiquity and the revival of a love of learning was the first chink in the medieval armor. Second, the Protestant Reformation, while containing a bit of the medieval savagery that came before, broke the back of the medieval Catholic Church's power. The final movement was the move to explore the world primarily financed by the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns.

Chapter III, *One Man Alone*, focuses on the most significant of these explorations, that led by Ferdinand Magellan. The chapter traces Magellan's background and voyage across the world. It ends with some brief observations concerning how it finally destroyed the medieval mind.



Quotes

"The ethnic tide then settled in its conquered lands and darkness descended upon the devastated, unstable continent. It would not lift until forty medieval generations had suffered, wrought their pathetic destinies, and passed on." (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"Was the medieval world a civilization, comparable to Rome before it or to the modern era which followed? If by civilization one means a society which has reached a relatively high level of cultural and technological development, the answer is no." (Chapter 1, p. 15).

"Rising gusts of wind, disregarded at the time, signaled the coming storm." (Chapter 1, p. 24).

"His name ricochets down the canyons of nearly five centuries - ricochets, because the trajectory of his zigzagging life, never direct, dodged this way and that, ever elusive and often devious." (Chapter 2, p. 31).

"The count could have asked, though he didn't, what all this misery had to do with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact it had nothing to do with them." (Chapter 2, p. 60).

"As medieval shadows receded, European morals declined." (Chapter 2, p. 73).

"That was typical of the age. The most powerful men knew artistic genius when they saw it, and their unstinting support of it, despite their deplorable private lives and abuse of authority, is unparalleled." (Chapter 2, p. 87).

"Leonardo, sui generis, questioned everything. Rather than accept the world God had created, as Christians had always done, he probed endlessly into what human ingenuity could achieve by struggling against it." (Chapter 2, p. 93).

"The reawakening - the establishing of new ties with the gems of antiquity - was one of the great triumphs of the Renaissance." (Chapter 2, p. 104).

"Therefore, in the most momentous decision of his life - and one of the most momentous in the history of Christianity - he formally denounced [Martin Luther]." (Chapter 2, p. 136).

"A common reformation should be undertaken of the spiritual and temporal estates." (Chapter 2, p. 157).

"Now I no longer fear, and I am publishing a book in the German tongue about Christian reform, directed against the pope, in language as violent as if I were addressing Antichrist." (Chapter 2, p. 164).



"German princes, the king of France - even the pope - were loath to give Charles the powers he needed to suppress Luther. Moreover, the monk and the movement he had launched had grown too powerful to be suppressed. The emperor tried mightily, but it would be his dying effort, and medieval Christendom would die with him." (Chapter 2, p. 174).

"Crowned in 1558 at the age of twenty-five, Elizabeth I restored Protestantism, revived her father's Act of Supremacy, and reigned over England for forty-five glorious years." (Chapter 2, p. 218-9).

"Now their grizzled commander is patiently checking the stores for a two-year expedition - never dreaming that the great voyage will take three years, and that he will not survive it." (Chapter 3, p. 225).

"What sets Magellan apart is his unswerving determination to match them and thus become a hero himself." (Chapter 3, p. 226).

"By completing the circuit of the globe, the expedition had provided the first empirical proof that it was a sphere." (Chapter 3, p. 269).

"He was not the wisest man of his time. Erasmus was. Neither was he the most gifted. That, surely, was Leonardo. But Magellan became what, as a child, he had yearned to be - the era's greatest hero." (Chapter 3, p. 287).

"Strong, ardent, and devout men have been struggling with its challenge for nearly five centuries. They have met with varying degrees of success. Worldwide there are now a billion Christians alive. Confidence in an afterlife, however, is another matter. The specter of skepticism haunts shrines and altars. Worshipers want to believe, and most of the time they persuade themselves that they do. Hardest of all is the sense of loss, the knowledge that the serenity of medieval faith, and the certitude of everlasting glory, are forever gone." (Chapter 3, p. 292).



Topics for Discussion

Explain three traits that Manchester thinks are essential to the "medieval mind."

What is Renaissance Humanism? How did it help to destroy the medieval mind? Who were its main leaders, according to Manchester?

What is Protestantism? How did it help to destroy the medieval mind? Who were its main leaders, according to Manchester?

What is Manchester's opinion of European Christianity? What are his criticisms? Does he view any aspect of it favorably?

Why is Ferdinand Magellan singled out as the book's greatest hero? What was it about Magellan's character that so impressed Manchester?

How did Magellan's voyage help to destroy the medieval mind? Manchester claims that he helped to refute the doctrine of Biblical literalism, which in turn helped to undermine Christianity. What is Manchester's argument for this? Is it valid?

In general, what do you think the point of *A World Lit Only By Fire* is? What kind of ideological agenda does Manchester have?