**Why am I reading The Story of Europe from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Reformation?**

The Roman Empire fell during the first half of the 5th century. In 410 C.E. Rome was plundered by heathen barbarians. Even before this date, the Roman Empire had begun to abandon its outposts as the line between the Roman provinces and the barbarian world grew more and more blurred. The Germanic tribes who overran the old Roman provinces found it difficult to manage any political organization equal to the order that was Rome. Trade disappeared, Roman roads that connected the once inter-linking provinces fell in disrepair. Without the order that was Rome, Western Europe was plunged into what some call the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, or the Medieval Period. This is approximately dated at about 500 C.E. and ends in the 15th century.

What manner of political system replaced the chaos left in the wake of the decline of Rome? The breakdown of law and order throughout the vast region that had once been the Roman Empire obliged men to work out local arrangements to protect themselves and their land. This usually meant that a local chieftain or a strong-arm fighting man would agree to organize protection for others in return for their land and their service to him. This arrangement was called feudalism, from the Latin foedum of feudum, meaning a contract. During the 9th to the 12th centuries especially, men were bound to each other by contracts of protection, service and loyalty in exchange for land and rights. Although feudalism was not at first a planned society, it gradually came to be systematized into a self-sustaining unit. Thus, there were feudal estates all throughout Europe ruled by local Christian lords who ruled them. This is the period of King Arthur, Robin Hood, Tristan and Iseult, Richard the Lionheart, Charlemagne, the love story of Abelard and Heloise, some of these mythical and some fact.

Now the religious part, about 420 C. E. St. Augustine (bishop of the Roman African province in present-day Algeria) wrote his *City of God*. Here he wrote that there were only two “cities,” the earthly and the heavenly, the temporal and the eternal, the city of man and the City of God. The earthly city was the domain of state and empire, of political authority and political obedience. But it had no inherently divine character of its own. The emperor was human. The state was not absolute. It was really subordinate in some way to a higher and spiritual power. This power lay in the City of God. By the City of God, Augustine meant and many have interpreted as the heavenly city, the abode of God and of his saints, or of certain elect spirits of this world, the good people as opposed to the bad. Few books have been more influential in setting the basis for the development of Western Christianity.

Only one institution maintained a tie with the civilized past. Only one could still receive news or dispatch agents over the whole area, the Christian Church with a framework still standing that consisted of bishoprics, monasteries, and abbeys. In a world of violence these served as islands of quiet, peace and contemplation. From these places, writing and literature and universities will emerge, though the content will be largely theological. That is why some people say that the monasteries and abbeys saved “civilization.” The bishops, abbots, and monks in these places looked with veneration to Rome as the spot where St. Peter, the first apostle, had been martyred. And with no emperor any longer in Rome, the bishops of Rome took over the government and the public affairs of the city. The growing authority of the popes of Rome was fortified by the primary argument that St. Peter had imparted spiritual authority given to him by Christ himself to the Roman bishops who were his successors. This doctrine, called the “Petrine supremacy,” was based on two Bible verses where Peter as the head of the charge was given the “power of the keys” to open and close the doors of eternal salvation. It was the church that incorporated the barbarians into a higher way of life, and when barbarians embraced a more civilized way of life, it was the church that they entered.

For you to be successful in any history course, particularly an Advanced Placement one, you must be able to master the skill of periodization. That means that you can intellectually surmise what comes before what and what factors are key to making that distinction. Many of the AP Euro questions on your national exam require you to master this. That is why I just presented an overview of the periods that preceded the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Your summer reading is designed to bring you into the world of the Universal Church, a world dominated by the supremacy of the Pope, the undisputed ruler of the Christian world. Our story begins with the fall of the Roman Empire because last year, it is pretty much where you left off. The Renaissance, a period that marks the beginning of Modern Europe is where your AP European History course begins. However, you did not get an opportunity to study how the feudal period ends and modern Europe begins. This book will fill in the gaps. When we talk about rivers, regions, people, this book should provide you with the necessary background to understand what is being referred to. At the time of the Renaissance, all peoples in Europe were of only one religion, Christian as dictated by the doctrines emitted by the Popes of Rome, thus the name, Universal Church. Much happened between the fall of Rome and the beginning of our study; at times, chaos in the Medieval Church and challenges to the pope’s authority. This little book will fill you in since we technically begin our study in 1450.

The reading consists of a brief history of all the regions of Europe, so that you can get an idea of where names originated, where Christianity first emerged, the distinction between the Eastern and the Western Churches and why some countries tend to behave in the way that they do. As you read this book, mark it, go online and look up some of the images talked about in the book. The internet is full of them! It will make the book so much more enjoyable. As you read, complete the assignment and have it prepared for delivery on the first day of school. There will be an assessment in addition to the summer assignment.