

CHURCH HISTORY

"Now these things took place as examples for us..."

Lesson 9

Charlemagne's Empire

The Middle Ages - Pt. II

The time must be examined in both religious and political realms. After battling each other for centuries the church will finally triumph over kings. But the Middle Ages will set the stage for dramatic change in the second millennium.



Political Developments

The Great Migrations/Barbarian Invasions.

The greatest force for change in this period is the great migrations. Though the Middle Ages are often pictured as a time of little movement, they begin with a period of one of the greatest migrations in history.

Huns, Visigoths, Franks, Lombards, Anglo-Saxons, Teutons, Vikings and more will invade and take most of Germany, France, Italy and parts of Spain. Rome is sacked. Lombards will control most of Italy for 200 years. The church will spend the first half of the Middle Ages working to convert these *Barbarians*.

When the western church loses support of the emperor in Constantinople, they must look elsewhere for support. Rome eventually turns to the Franks in southern Europe. Their alliance re-establishes an empire sharing church and state.

This begins with Clovis (466-511) who is the first of the so-called barbarians to convert to Christianity (496). He unites the many tribes of the Franks and leads them to Christianity. His lineage will produce Pepin the Short - who will build a strong alliance with Rome - and Charlemagne who will establish the largest empire since the glory days of Rome.

Charlemagne is raised a Christian, though he continues a very profligate lifestyle. As with most kings in that time he spends most of his reign in constant war.

In 800 the pope will declare Charlemagne Emperor of the West. Charlemagne's kingdom is referred to as the Holy Roman Empire and that title will be used almost to the time of the Reformation.

Division Between the East and the West by 1074

He converts many conquered nations through mass conversions. This relationship between church and state benefitted both. Rome had its army to defend and propagate the church. Charlemagne had the influence of the church to strengthen his position. Now a universal empire existed beside a universal church.

That would not last and eventually the popes succeed in bringing the emperor under the control of the church. Because Charlemagne was crowned by the pope, the church claimed emperors and other rulers were under the pope and were obligated to come to his defense whenever he called.



Eastern vs. Western Church

A division existed in the church from as early as the 3rd century.

But when the capital of the empire moved to Constantinople, a power vacuum was left in Rome. The Roman Bishop's position was strengthened and he is already being recognized as the head of the church in the west. The Bishop of Constantinople controls the East. There is division for many reasons: Geographical; Cultural (Greek vs. Latin/Roman); Theological (Holy Spirit's progression; dual nature of Jesus); and Political.

Division will not be official until 1074 though it exists in reality long before then.

Religious Developments

Many historians begin the Middle Ages with Gregory I who becomes pope in 590. From a wealthy family, he sold all family possessions and became a monk.

Historian Earle Cairns writes this about him: "He was a man of humility who thought of himself as the "servant of the servants of God." He was a zealous missionary and was instrumental in winning the English to Christianity. His legal training, tact, and common sense made him one of the ablest administrators the Roman church had during the Middle Ages. But like many men of his age, he was unduly superstitious and credulous. His *Dialogues* (593) display his unbounded credulity in what seemed to be miraculous to the medieval minds. Moreover, though he had some training in sacred learning, his scholarship was marred by a lack of knowledge of the original languages of the Bible. Though he spent seven years as ambassador to Constantinople, he never learned their Greek language."

"His greatest work was to expand the power of the Roman bishop. He never claimed the title of pope but would not let anyone else claim it either." (Cairn; *Christianity Through the Centuries*; p 161)

Islam's conquests stop the spread of the church in the East

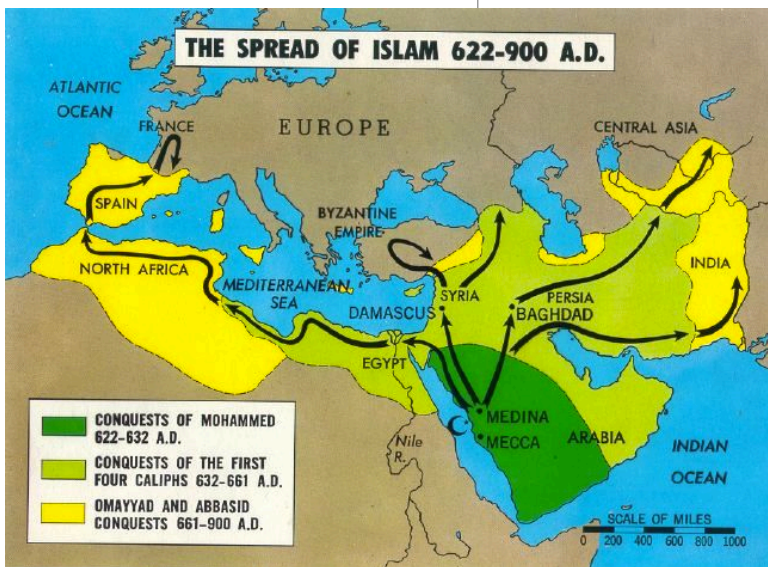
His theology did not follow Augustine. He believed in free will; that man did not inherit guilt from Adam but only sin as a disease to which all were subject; only the elect were predestined; grace is not irresistible and that it is based on both the foreknowledge of God and, to some extent, the merits of man. He upheld the inspiration of the Bible, but gave tradition equal authority. Yet Augustine's ideas would hold sway for the church in the future.

Later successors will build on his foundation. Church power will continue to grow based on the foundation he established. The church will come to control 1/3 of all the land in Europe. Mass "conversions" swelled the numbers of Christians. By the late Middle Ages the church was so dominant in Europe the inhabitants regarded themselves as living in "Christendom."

Islam

The Rise of Islam in the 7th century plays a major role in the limitation of the spread of the church in the East. Most conquered peoples were given a choice - Islam, pay tribute, or the sword. Sometimes tolerance was shown and people in tribute paying areas were allowed to practice their faith. Islam spread from Africa to Spain and was finally stopped in Europe at Tours by Charles Martel. Otherwise, it would have taken Europe.

It will eventually take the eastern capital of Constantinople in 1453. Islam was mainly advanced during this time by the sword. As we will see later, one of the main reasons for the Crusades was in response to Islam's forced capture of lands and people.



The growth of the Roman church in Europe during this time was of pagans who were required to follow their rulers into Christianity. Christianity, like Islam was being advanced by force. On one occasion, Charlemagne gave a conquered army the opportunity to convert or be executed. When they demurred Charlemagne beheaded 4,500 in one morning.

The church had major problems managing these unconverted pagans. This is when the church begins adapting by "Christianizing" Pagan practices - image worship; pagan feast days; worship practices; veneration of goddesses (Mary) and many accommodations to pagan superstitions. Manchester observes, "As mass baptisms swelled its congregations, the Church further indulged the converts by condoning ancient rites, or attempting to transform them, in the hope - never realized - that they would die out" (William Manchester; *A World Lit Only By*

Fire). These changes reflect the church emphasis upon church membership and not on a Christlike life. Being baptized and submitting to the right doctrines and sacraments and filling the church coffers made you a faithful member. A spiritual way of life may have been preached but hardly demanded. The lack of spirituality will be seen in the corruption and decadence that will be seen even in the highest church offices in Rome itself. The Roman Catholic church has become an institution that has almost no resemblance to simple first century Christianity.