

CHURCH HISTORY

UNTIL 1054 A.D.

Taken from "Church History" by Dennis Mock

Primary impact of the era on the Christian Church in history

What happened from 100 A.D. – 312 A.D. unfortunately laid the foundation for the next 1200 years of Church History!

- Persecution continued to cause the Church to spread as Christianity became illegal
- Martyrdom was the fate of those who stayed true to the faith.
- Spiritual emphasis in worship gave way to more formality and ritual.
- The Lord's Supper and Baptism were corrupted into grace-giving "saving sacraments".
- Ecclesiastical organization took the place of spiritual vitality in the Church.
- The Church became a religious organization not a spiritual organism.
- Opposition from pagan societies caused the writing of Apologies (defenses of the faith).
- Heresy within the Church caused leaders to begin to write out doctrine in a systematic way.
- The era paved the way for
 - the Roman Catholic Church.
 - the great Church Councils and Creeds.
 - the development of orthodox theology.

ERA OF THE "CHRISTIAN" ROMAN EMPIRE

312 A.D.

590 A.D.

Christianity
The State Religion
Fall of Rome
Theology Defined

**Conversion
Of
Constantine**

Church
Councils
Creeds
Fathers

**Gregory I
The 1st
Pope**

- Conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 A.D.
- Christianity the official Roman religion
- Church Creeds
- Church Councils - theological debates
[Deity and humanity of Christ]

The Trinity

Nicea

Ephesus

Constantinople

Chalcedon

- Monastic Movement
- Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Roman) churches
- Golden Age of Church Fathers Leo I the first unofficial "Pope"
- Athanasius Chrysostom

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- Jerome
 - Augustine
 - Justinian I
 - Barbaric Invasions
 - Fall of Rome
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ERA OF THE "CHRISTIAN" ROMAN EMPIRE 312 A.D. - 590 A.D.
[Church Councils, Creeds, and Christianity as the State Religion]

This period of Church History was characterized by

- The conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312.
- The establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire.
- The entanglement of Church and State.
- The development of Church creeds.
- The settlement of theological controversies in great Church Councils.
- The fall of the old Roman Empire and the invasion of barbaric tribes from Europe and Asia.
- The beginning of the monastic movement as monks moved into monasteries to preserve the true faith from worldliness and corruption by the organized Church.
- The establishment of the bishop of Rome as head (Pope) of the Western Church.
- The beginnings of the division between the Western Church in Rome and the Eastern Church in Constantinople.

**THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THIS ERA
WOULD PLAGUE THE CHURCH FOR AT LEAST 1000 YEARS!**

MAJOR POLITICAL/HISTORICAL/CULTURAL BACKGROUND

- The Roman Empire was in its declining stages and had failed to destroy Christianity despite severe and sometimes Empire-wide persecution. Upon the death of Galerius in 311 A.D. a struggle for supremacy within the already divided Roman Empire took place.

In 312 A.D. Constantine, under what he said was help from God through a vision of a cross in the sky along with the words "in this sign conquer", won control as Emperor and openly favored Christianity.

Christianity was officially recognized as the Emperor's religion with great privileges and favor. The capital of the Eastern (Byzantine) Roman Empire was established in 330 A.D. at Constantinople, (Byzantium) which became 1600 years later the capital of the Turkish Empire and which is known today as Istanbul, Turkey.

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- Church and State became inseparably mixed as Constantine ruled over Church leaders much as he did government officials.
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- Under Emperor Theodosius in 380 A.D. Christianity was officially declared the religion of the empire with adherents to be called "Catholic Christians".
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- The "wedding" of one Church to the State in the early part of the fourth century was perhaps as politically motivated as anything else. Constantine and Theodosius saw Christianity as a way to unify the empire and bolster its crumbling foundations. Even so, the witness of Christian martyrs, moral

living, strong family units and the love of Christians or each other had finally had a positive impact on society.

- The Roman Empire became split along both political and religious lines as the Western part of the Empire was centered in Rome with its Roman (Western) version of Christianity and the Eastern part in Constantinople with its Eastern (Greek Orthodox) version.
 - With the Emperor in Constantinople, the bishop of Rome took on new political power in addition to his religious importance.
 - Constantinople would remain intact for a number of centuries although it would be greatly impacted by Muslim influence.
 - The Eastern part of the Roman Empire which centered in Constantinople would remain intact for a number of centuries although it would be greatly impacted by Muslim influence.
 - The height of the Roman Byzantine Empire was perhaps reached under **Justinian I** who ruled from 527-565 A.D. Byzantine art and culture was mixed with Roman law, Christianity and Greek philosophy. Justinian saw the state as God's instrument in the world. He established new Roman legal codes, promoted art and culture and built churches on a grand scale. He also defeated the vandals in North Africa and Goths in Italy. Justinian defended Eastern Nicene orthodoxy and even closed some Greek schools of philosophy. The Church identity dissolved into a "Christian" society run by the State.
 - The Western part of the Roman Empire was not so fortunate as it was overrun by hordes of barbarians, first from Europe and then Asia. Rome was sacked in 410 A.D. by Gothic tribes
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who settled in various parts of the Roman Empire.

Later, Mongol hordes from Asia under **Attila the Hun** threatened to all but destroy Rome. In 452 A.D. Bishop Leo of Rome negotiated with Attila on behalf of the emperor, and Rome was spared for a time. The political and religious, genius of Leo was soon recognized.

In 455 A.D. the vandals overran Rome and killed the Emperor Maximus. Again Leo intervened and begged for mercy. Rome was looted and many religious sites destroyed, but the city was not burned.

- By 476 A.D. the Western Roman Empire was all but dead following invasions by barbaric German tribes. The last imperial Roman Emperor in the West was dead. The Germanic invaders were eventually all but absorbed into the peoples of the empire, but the glory of the Roman Empire was gone.
 - Culturally what was left of the Roman Empire in the West was a mixture of Roman, Greek, Christian and barbaric cultures.
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Major religious movements and developments

The main religious developments of this era can be summarized as follows:

- **The East-West division in the Church**
As has already been noted, the Christian Church divided into two rather distinct groups - the Church in the West headed by the bishop of Rome and the Church in the East which was headed by the Emperor in Constantinople. The Eastern
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Church had a number of important bishops in key cities like Constantinople, Alexandria, Carthage, Hippo, Antioch, Jerusalem and Ephesus. A number of doctrinal and practical issues would later permanently separate the Eastern and Western divisions of the Church. In the West there really was no other bishop to contest the power of the Bishop of Rome. While in contrast, in the East no one bishop was able to assure control and authority.

- **The Christianization of the Barbaric invaders**
- To the credit of the Church, the Gospel was effectively preached to the barbaric invaders in the West, and missionary activity was prevalent and reached as far as England. In the East from major Christian centers like Alexandria, the Gospel reached out to parts of Africa, including Ethiopia.

But with the multitude of converts to Christianity came the influx of many pagan religious practices and thoughts.

Perhaps the area of greatest lack was in the training and teaching of these new converts in the principles and truths of Scripture.

Many of these conversions took place when pagan leaders married Christian women. One such incident involved Clovis (481-511 A.D.), Chief of the Franks in Northern Gaul (France). His Christian wife pointed him in the direction of Christ, and God worked to bring him to the point where in a military encounter he turned to God rather than the German gods. He was saved and his whole tribe baptized and thus

"Christianized." These "conversions" of entire tribes still raise serious issues since each individual must respond by faith in Christ.

• **The rise of the Pope to supremacy in the West**

Many political and religious factors have already been noted in the development of the Papacy in Rome. From about 313 A.D. forward the Bishop of Rome had been recognized as special although not supreme. Rome was considered to be the foremost Apostolic Church founded by Peter, and the misinterpretation of Matthew 16:13-18 was used as the basis for supremacy and Apostolic succession.

After the capital of the Roman Empire had moved East to Constantinople, both the religious and political significance of the bishop of Rome was enhanced. There was simply no other strong civil leader. **And the bishop of Rome had been able to maintain a stronger doctrinal stance than had been true in the East where most of the doctrinal heresies arose.**

Further, the bishops of Rome had developed a loyal following among monks doing missionary work throughout the Empire.

There were also a number of strong bishops in the Roman Church over the years including **Gregory of Nyssa** (330-395 A.D.) under whom Augustine served and **Damascus I** (366-384 A.D.) under whose order the Bible was translated into Latin by Jerome (the "Latin Vulgate" translation).

It was **Leo I** who as bishop of Rome from 440-461 A.D. first began to use unofficially the title **Pope** which means "great". Leo's prestige in the religious world was greatly enhanced by his political negotiation skills and success related to Attila the

Hun and other barbaric leaders. By the time of **Gregory I**, who became bishop in 590 A.D., all that was missing in the papacy was the official title of Pope.

Major doctrinal disputes. heresies and religious practice

- The period of 312 A.D. to 590 A.D. saw **negative development** in both the **practice of worship** as the Church **moved toward formal ritualism and "saving sacraments"** and the **organizational structure and government** within the Church as the bishops assumed non-biblical titles and positions, separated clergy and laymen and created hierarchal authority and structure.

But there were also some **very significant developments** of a positive nature in the **area of theology and doctrine**.

Two primary factors contributed to the formalization of doctrine in this period:

- 1 The teaching of serious heresies related to the nature, person and work of Christ and the Trinity.
- 2 The need for a common body of doctrine for Christianity as it became the official religion of the State.

Church Councils were called, and leading churchmen were asked to state and defend various theological views in an attempt to arrive at an "orthodox" set of beliefs for Christianity. In the process, "Creeds" were developed for use in the churches. "Orthodox" refers to that which is right according to a recognized standard and is commonly believed.

Five major Church Councils will be highlighted in this section:

Nicea (325 A.D.), **Constantinople** (381 A.D.),
Ephesus (431 A.D.), **Chalcedon** (451 A.D.) and
Carthage (397 A.D.).

Interestingly, most of these doctrinal disputes centered in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Orthodoxy in the West had been fairly well controlled by the Bishop of Rome and explained by such great Western theologians as Tertullian.

Primary impact of the era on the Christian Church in history.

This period of Church History, perhaps more than any other except the Reformation, has had a lasting influence on the Church. The Church has been impacted in the following ways:

- When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Church and State became inseparably mixed.
- Church Councils and Creeds defined orthodox doctrine for Christianity in the face of heresy and doctrinal disputes.
- The establishment of the primacy of the bishop of Rome as Pope of the Church led to Roman Catholicism and ecclesiastical abuse in the Church.
- The gap between clergy and laity widened as formal liturgy increased.
- The monastic movement provided an imperfect means of preserving Christianity during the dark ages.
- The beginning of the split of the Christian "Catholic" Church into Western and Eastern factions guaranteed major divisions in the Church.
- The development of a substantial body of Christian literature is still being felt today.

ERA OF THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

590 A.D.

800 A.D.

Pope in Roman church in West;
Muslims invade the East

**Gregory the
Pope**

Church involved
in missions

**Charlemagne
the 15th
Holy Roman
Emperor**

- Gregory I - the first Pope
- Founding of Islam
- Muslim invasions
- Formalization of Roman Catholic Theology
- Missionaries to Europe
- "Icon" controversy
- Joining of Church and State in 1st Holy Roman Emperor (Charlemagne)

Era of the Medieval Church

590-800 A. D.

[Pope in the West]

[Muslims in the East]

[Church moves out in missions]

The long period of Church History from 590-1517 A.D. is perhaps the most misunderstood of all, being called by many scholars the "dark ages" or the Christian Middle Ages. It is treated as one long era by many Church historians.

But momentous forces were at work both within the Church and outside the Church which would shape modern history - and Christianity was at the very center of it all!

This period of Church History from 590-1517 A.D. may be characterized by:

- the evangelization of the Teutonic invaders from Northern and Western Europe by the Church.

- the invasion in the East by hordes of Muslims in the 7th and 8th centuries.

- the formation of alliances between Church and State known as the Holy Roman Empire in Europe under Charlemagne around 800 A.D.

- the controversy over the worship of "icons", especially in the East

- the final, irrevocable split in 1054 A.D. between the Western Church headed in Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church headed in Constantinople.

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- the Crusades to the Holy Land.
 - the final rise to power of the Roman Catholic Church under the Pope who became both a religious and political leader of worldwide significance.
 - the rise of feudalism in Europe.
 - the full development and corruption of Roman Catholic theology and practice.
 - scholasticism and the revival of learning.
 - significant but futile attempts at reform within the Roman Catholic Church.
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It is virtually impossible to separate political and religious movements within this period because they were so interrelated. Developments in this period of almost 1000 years are also incredibly complex and detailed and thus beyond the scope of this course. The emphasis will be on a summary of the major developments and how they impacted the Church in the West and in the East, subdivided into four key time periods

Note: Many scholars and Church historians consider the entire period from 590 A.D. - 1517 A.D. as the Era of the Medieval Church. However, for purposes of communication and understanding it seems better to divide it into four separate period of time or eras.

In the West

The beginning of this period is marked by the date 590 A.D. when **Gregory I "The Great"** became Bishop of Rome and functioned as **Pope** though not claiming the title.

Gregory's greatest contributions centered around

- increasing the power, prestige, land holdings and wealth of the Bishop of Rome which had both religious and political implications. Gregory's influence spread over Gaul (France), Spain, Britain, Africa and Italy.
 - initiating great missionary activity through monks in: Northern and Western Europe and the British Isles which brought Christianity and Western culture to the Teutonic inhabitants of the land.
 - extensive writings which would shape Roman Catholic theology.
- Shortly after Gregory became Pope, Italy was invaded by the **Lombards**, a Germanic people who had largely been converted earlier to Arian Christianity, which denied the full deity of Christ. Gregory was able to work out an acceptable peace agreement and over a period of years the Lombards moved toward orthodox Christianity but controlled the religious and political scene. The Roman Popes began to search for a powerful ally who could free them from the Lombard domination.

The Franks, who had been Christianized under Clovis (466-510 A.D.), were the most logical choice: Clovis' sons were not able to maintain control after his death and the Franks' kingdom was divided into mayoral states until about 687 A.D. when Pepin of Heristal gained control of the Frankish empire.

In 714 A.D. **Charles Martel** came to power and played a significant role politically, religiously and militarily as he defeated the advancing Muslims at the Battle of Tours (or Poitiers) in 732 A.D. and saved Spain and Western Europe for Christianity. After over-running North Africa and much of the Middle East, the Muslims had headed west to conquer Europe.

Charles Martel was succeeded by **Pepin the Great** (also Pepin le Bref "the short") who took the title of King in 751 A.D. The Pope in Rome had requested help against the Lombards. A strange alliance was formed and Pepin was consecrated as King by Archbishop Boniface, the English missionary monk to the Germans.

What is significant is the idea which Charlemagne picked up from Augustine's City of God of a **universal Christian Catholic Church joined to a revived Roman government to form a Holy Roman Empire.**

The religious and the secular were so intertwined as to be impossible to distinguish. For 1000 years until 1806 this concept would dominate Europe and influence Western civilization and the Church.

The year 800 A.D. was indeed significant as the Holy Roman Empire came into existence.

In the East

- This period of time saw the beginning of the end for the dominance of the Christian Church in the East, although it would not finally fall until 1453 A.D. when Constantinople came under Muslim control. The downfall came primarily through political and military means. Although the lack of missions, evangelism and discipleship by the Church was a major factor.
- The founder of **Islam** (the Muslim religion) was a Bedouin camel herder and tribesman from Arabia named Mohammed (c. 570-632 A.D.) who came into contact with both Christianity and Judaism. Based on a claimed vision and revelation from God, he started a religious movement which still impacts the world today. He favored monotheism against polytheism and idolatry and claimed that "Allah" was the one true God. By 630 A.D. Mohammed's movement had gained such strength that he conquered Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which became the capital and most holy place of Islam.

Mohammad died in 632 A.D., but for the next 100 years the Muslims gained incredible political and religious strength until the tide was finally halted at the Battle of Tours (or Poitiers) in 732 A.D., where Charles Martel defeated the Muslims who were about to invade Europe through Spain.

The Islamic invaders had already conquered Syria, Palestine (Israel), Egypt, North Africa and Persia by 650 A.D.

The expansion of Islam into the West by way of the northern side of the Mediterranean Crescent was temporarily halted in 717 and 718 A.D. at Constantinople, Turkey as the Eastern Empire under Leo the Isaurian successfully repulsed the Muslims.

The political/military victories took a great toll on the religious scene also as the defeated peoples were required to:

- embrace Islam
- pay tribute
- or die.
- The advancing tide of Muslims waned around 750 A.D., but it was able to establish an elaborate Arabian civilization headquartered in Baghdad (Iraq). It was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, including that of Aristotle, which made its way to Europe through Arabic Spain
- The wars fought by Islam were, in their way of thinking, really religious wars as they carried out the will of Allah.

MAJOR RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In the West

- Primarily through the work of **Gregory I** and those who followed him, the primacy of the Pope as a religious and political figure was firmly established.
- It was under Gregory that the bishop of Rome was recognized as the "head of all the churches".

Under Gregory I

- The Roman Church began to gain ownership and control of large parcels of land.
- Monasticism received official papal sanction.
- Roman Catholic theology took shape through his writings.

He falsely taught that:

- man was sinful, but not beyond cooperating with God's grace through the merit of good works.
- **baptism as a saving sacrament** brought forgiveness of sins to that point.
- after baptism, sins had to be atoned for by the individual doing **penance** (repentance, confession and meritorious good works involving giving, sacrifice and suffering) or face divine punishment. The greater the sin the greater the penance required.
- sinners could pray to **patron saints** of the faith for help and intercession with regard to sin.
- holy relics (artifacts, clothing, hair, etc., from the saint and martyrs) possessed magical religious power.

- if penance in this life were not sufficient at death a saint would have to go through a period of **purgatory** to pay for his sins before heaven.
- the Lord's Supper ("Eucharist" or mass) was also a saving sacrament which could deal with the sins of the participant and could be offered for saints in purgatory.
- in the celebration of "mass" then, was the beginning of the false notion that in the hands of the priest the elements literally became the sacrificial body and blood of Christ.
- the Bible was inspired but Roman Church tradition and teaching was of equal value and authority.

THE FORMULATION OF ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE, ALTHOUGH MOSTLY FALSE, WAS ALMOST COMPLETE UNDER GREGORY I.

ERA OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

800 A.D. |

| 1054 A.D.

Feudalism,
Holy Roman Emperors;
Church and State joined

Charlemagne
the 1st
Holy Roman
Emperor

"Icons";
rise of Pope's power

East
West
Church
Schism

- Charlemagne the 1st Holy Roman Emperor
- Rise of feudalism in Europe
- Church and State combined in Holy Roman Empire
- Church secularized, corrupted and ineffective
- Rise of Pope's power
- Split between Western (Roman) and Eastern Churches (Greek)

Some of the factors which led to the split are:

**Western Church
(Roman Catholic)**

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| 1 | Pope claimed supremacy over bishop of Eastern churches. |
| 2 | Theologically progressed after Chalcedon (451 A.D.) |
| 3 | Believed the Holy Spirit proceeded from Father and Son. |
| 4 | Focused on church policy and practice and used Latin. |
| 5 | Celebrated Easter on the Sunday following the 14th of Nisan. |
| 6 | Allowed use of icons in worship including statues. |
| 7 | Used unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper. |

**Eastern Church
(Eastern Orthodox)**

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|---|---|
| 1 | Eastern bishops were never united in their effort to have a comparable spokesman to the Pope in West. |
| 2 | Stagnated in doctrinal development after council of Chalcedon. |
| 3 | Believed in procession of the Spirit only from the Father. |
| 4 | Focused on theology and philosophy and used Greek. |
| 5 | Celebrated Easter on the 14th day of Nisan (Passover) regardless of the day of week. |
| 6 | Restricted icons to images like pictures but not in worship. |
| 7 | Forbade use of unleavened bread in Lord's Supper. |

8	All clergy had to be celibate.
9	Clergy could shave.
10	viewed salvation in legal terms and sin as a violation of God's holy character.
11	Formalized the church as an institution based on legal rights with Peter as founder of the church.
12	Icons became sacred religious relics to be venerated and worshipped.

8	Clergy below bishop could marry.
9	Clergy had to have a beard.
10	Viewed salvation in terms of restoring God's image in man and sin as marring that image.
11	Saw the church as the "mystical" body of Christ renewed by Holy Spirit. Icons represented only a manifestation of the heavenly image through man.
12	Icons represented only a manifestation of the heavenly image through man.

Major doctrinal disputes, heresies, and religious practices

Other than the dispute between Rome and Constantinople the only other major doctrinal issue that showed significant development was related to the Lord's Supper. In 831 A.D. a book was written by a monk named **Radbertus** entitled Of the Body and Blood of the Lord in which he falsely taught that in the Lord's Supper a miracle occurred which actually changed the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This served to increase the power of the priest and to lay the groundwork for the Roman Catholic doctrine of **transubstantiation**.