

Equipping Hour: Church History II (590 AD – 1054 AD)

Week 4: Roman Catholic Church (RCC), Spread of the Gospel and Islam

Introduction

This period in church history starts what is known as the medieval church (not to be confused with the *mid-evil* church). When we say *medieval* church period, it literally means *middle-age*. The question is, what age is it in the middle of? The world was focused and centered on Rome. When the Western Roman Empire fell, it struck at the heart of the world's culture, economy and religion. This is said to only have come back with the rise of culture during the Renaissance.

In church history the medieval church comprised the period from about 600 to 1517. The collapse of the western Roman Empire in the 5th century left an enormous vacuum in Western Europe. The political, economic, social, moral and intellectual structures of an immense civilization no longer existed. Indisputably, the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church filled this vacuum. The papacy gained legitimacy, monasticism (monks) became entrenched, Islam exploded across the Mediterranean and the Crusades resulted in response. As the church grew in influence and power though, it became corrupt and ineffective.

After the fall of Roman Empire in the West, the world was turned upside down. That entire region (now known as Portugal, Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic, Holland, Austria and Hungary) was ruled by various nomadic barbarian people groups. The Roman Empire had kept them at bay, but as the years grew so did their strength and number.

During the early medieval time, the rise of the Vikings plays a key role in history. In 793 A.D. they attacked a small island off the NE coast of England, destroying an abbey (a place for monks, government business and learning). They either killed the monks or put them into slavery. England's history says that the Vikings were "wholly violent and bloodthirsty." They are also described as "wolves among the sheep."

The Kingdom of the Franks (N. France, Belgium and W. Germany) under Charlemagne (800 A.D.) was particularly devastated by these raiders, who could sail up the Seine River (483 miles) with near freedom. Near the end of Charlemagne's<sup>1</sup> reign a string of Norse raids began, culminating in a gradual Scandinavian conquest and settlement of the region now known as Normandy. The church would continue to attempt to unite the area in order to stop all the invasions; ultimately setting up Christendom.

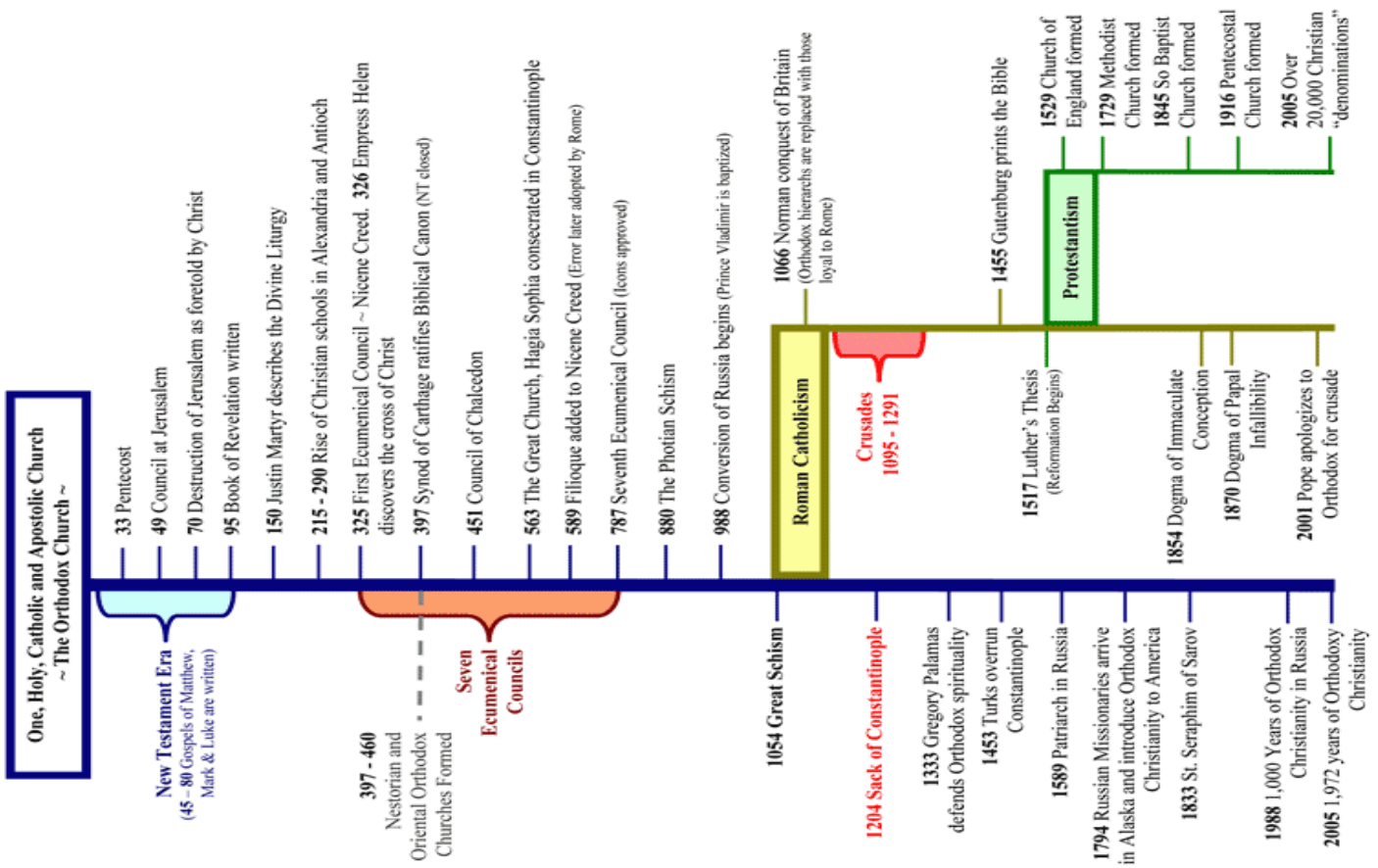
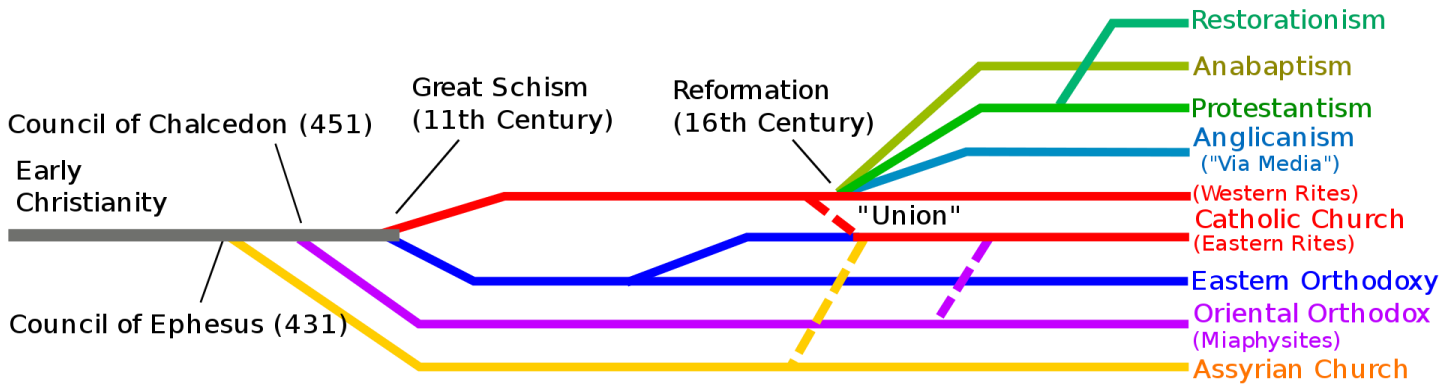
- 1) Before the 7<sup>th</sup> century, here are the results of the previous two counsels that we talked about last week.
  - a) The Council of Ephesus and the Council of Chalcedon came to the same meaning about the nature of Christ and the relationship of His humanity and divinity.
    - i) Because of the wording and the meaning of the words, there were some Christians that did not accept one or the other's definitions.
    - ii) What happened is that small groups of churches split off.

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<sup>1</sup> We will look at him further in the notes.

- iii) Today, we have the Egyptian Coptic Church, which is considered anti-Chalcedon. Though, today we would also argue that they concerning the divinity / humanity of Christ they believe the same way we do. Their separation has more to do with politics and persecution.
- iv) It was from the decision at Chalcedon in 451 that the first Christian vs. Christian persecution happened. The anti-Chalcedonian church was severely persecuted for not accepting the decision which was handed down from the council.

## Major branches within Christianity



Note: All Christian churches can be traced back historically to the Orthodox Church founded by the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Bubonic Plague (The Justinian Plague 541 A.D. – 549 A.D....with outbreaks until 747 A.D.)**

- 1) Once again the church is faced with an outbreak, but this one is different. This is the first recorded occurrence of the Bubonic Plague. This did not just happen in Roman areas either, it struck Europe, Middle East, N. Africa and Britain.
  - a) Some historians put the death toll between 25 – 100 million. Historians of that time record that there were over 10,000 dying daily in Constantinople. Having no place to put the bodies, the city was constantly infected and smelled of death.
  - b) This had massive impacts on not only the Roman Empire but also on Christianity.
    - i) As the government had been funding wars and the building of churches, their money was low. Now with this plague, their tax revenues were drying up.
    - ii) Prices of goods were soaring, farms were being shut down and trade came to a near standstill. This was the perfect time for Rome's enemies to attack.
- 2) With the emperor no longer controlling the whole empire, the people turned to the pope of Rome. He alone would seek to guide the nation and the church.
- 3) Throughout all of church history, the goal has been the unification of the church. Dating back to the Apostle Paul, the unity of the church is not only where she gets her strength but by that unity proclaims the gospel to the onlooking world.

### **Gregory I (appointed Pope of Rome in 590 A.D. died 604 A.D.)**

- 1) Though he refused the title of pope, administratively he organized the papal system of government that characterized the entire medieval period.
  - a) Thus all the major bishops of the West looked to him for guidance and leadership.
  - b) He likewise standardized the liturgy and theology of the budding Roman church. Doctrines such as the veneration of Mary, purgatory, an early form of transubstantiation and praying to departed saints found their infant pronouncements in his writings.
- 2) He was born into a wealthy family, but denounced his wealth and joined a monastery in hopes of growing in holiness.
  - a) He founded seven monasteries in Sicily and one in Rome, and himself entered the latter about 575.
- 3) Sin might be forgiven on condition of repentance, which involved contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Satisfaction included penance, and the penance was in proportion to the sin. On this was the vast complex penitential system of the Middle Ages constructed, and—combined with the doctrine of purgatory—it led to that mechanical theory of penance and indulgences against which Luther protested and which led on to the Reformation in Germany.<sup>2</sup>
- 4) The musical reforms instituted under Gregory can also be viewed in perspective of his very significant efforts to exterminate the last remnants of the Arian heresy and to resolve controversy between Rome and Constantinople.

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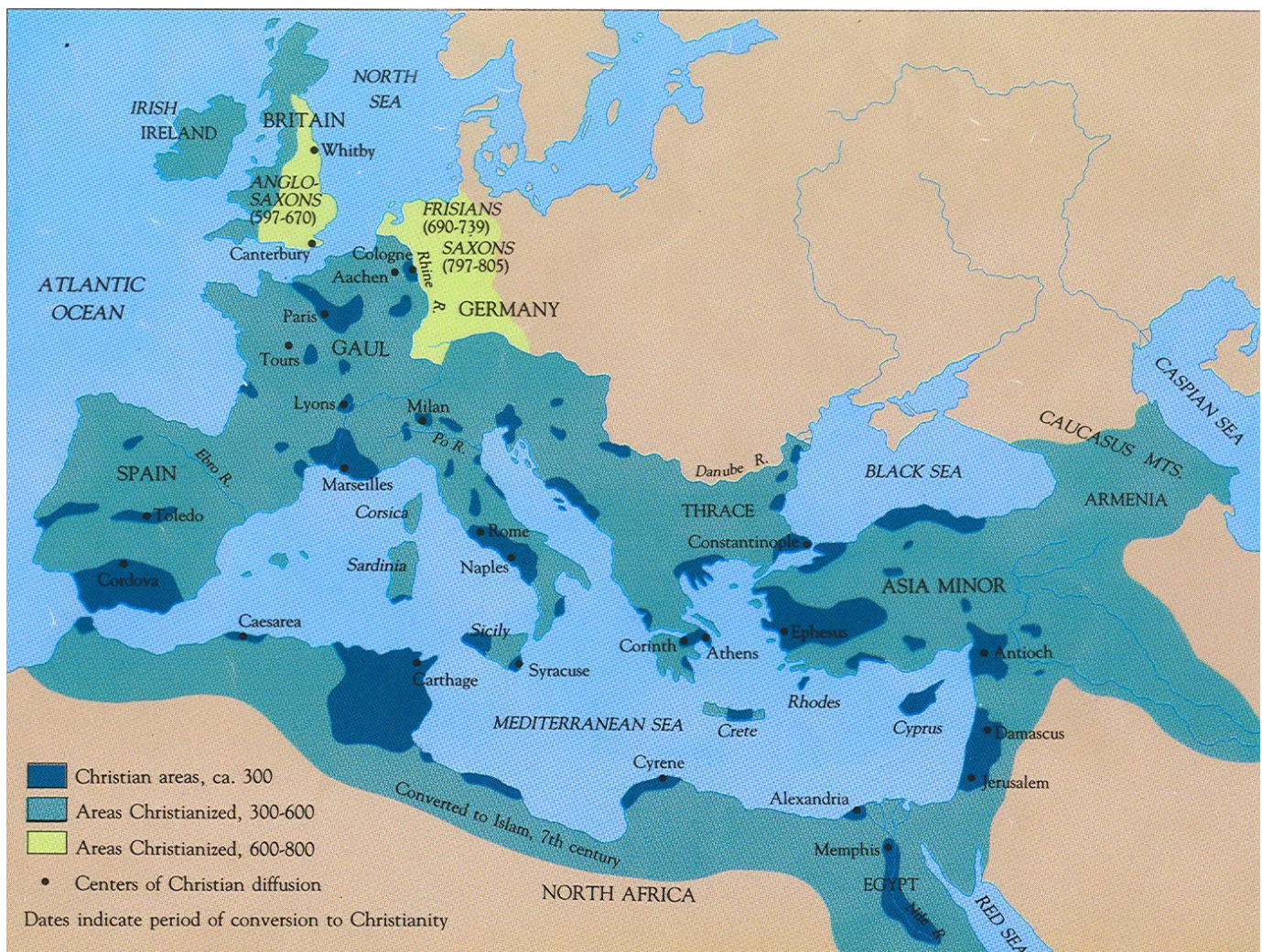
<sup>2</sup> *Who's Who in Christian History* Gregory the Great



- a) Gregorian Chant is named for him. His role is now seen as that of codifier and collector, though he possibly wrote hymns. His music had no harmonies nor any instruments.

### Mission Activity of the Western Church During Gregory the Great's Reign

- 1) His goal was to unite the Western Empire and he saw that missionaries were the key.
- 2) The government had fallen apart and he saw the opportunity to take over as both emperor and pope.
- 3) There was one place in Western Europe that had already been proselytized, Ireland.
  - a) In 400 A.D. a priest named Patrick went there, shared the gospel, set up churches and monasteries.
- 4) Gregory, being a monk himself, decided that sending out monks to spread the gospel was the thing to do. He also had the help of Irish believers.
- 5) In 597 A.D., 40 monks went from Rome to southern Britain to share the gospel.
  - a) Efforts to bring Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England were not as smooth, but during the 7th century Christian missionaries, sent from both Ireland and the Papacy, were able to convert various rulers. However, parts of the country would revert to paganism as the Vikings invaded and established their rule during the ninth and tenth centuries.
  - b) The ruler of the kingdom of Kent (SE Britain) was converted to Christianity. He allowed the monks to build a church in the capital, Canterbury.



- i) The bishop of Canterbury, today, is the head of the Anglican (Church of England) church. The Anglican church split from the RCC in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by King Henry VIII.
- c) Irish monks continued spreading the gospel in N. Ireland and most of Europe until 1050 A.D.
- 6) Medieval historians have pointed out that conversion efforts of Christian missionaries were often a top-down process, in which they looked to convert their leaders of various peoples, with the hopes that the lower classes would gradually fall in line.<sup>3</sup>
- 7) Though this was an effective tactic, unfortunately it slowly produced a Christendom society.
- 8) The Eastern Church (based in Constantinople) did not perform as well with regards to missions as the Western church did. It had become static and simply sought to keep the Muslims out of the city.

### **The Rise of Islam (Early 7<sup>th</sup> Century )**

Up until the 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century, Judaism and Christianity stood as the only monotheistic faiths in the world. Christianity had exploded and taken the world by storm. Judaism was not as fast moving, as the Temple had been destroyed and Israel ceased to exist. Even through all the wars, famines, plagues and disagreements, the church had survived. Though she was badly beaten and in some disarray, she was strong.

The efforts of Gregory the Great were starting to bear fruit as many in Northern Europe were coming to the faith. Britain was also starting to show some growth as they were sending out missionaries to further the gospel and unite the area. War was seeming to wain and it looked like the church was going to, once again, take dominance over the area.

Then came the Muslims. From a camel driver named Muhammad, a third monotheistic religion bloomed in the world. Muhammad, as he travelled with his father, had heard about Christianity and Judaism. After marrying a wealthy woman, he was able to devote all his time to religious meditation and ponder both these religions. He came to the conclusion that there was only one God and the worship of idols was sin.

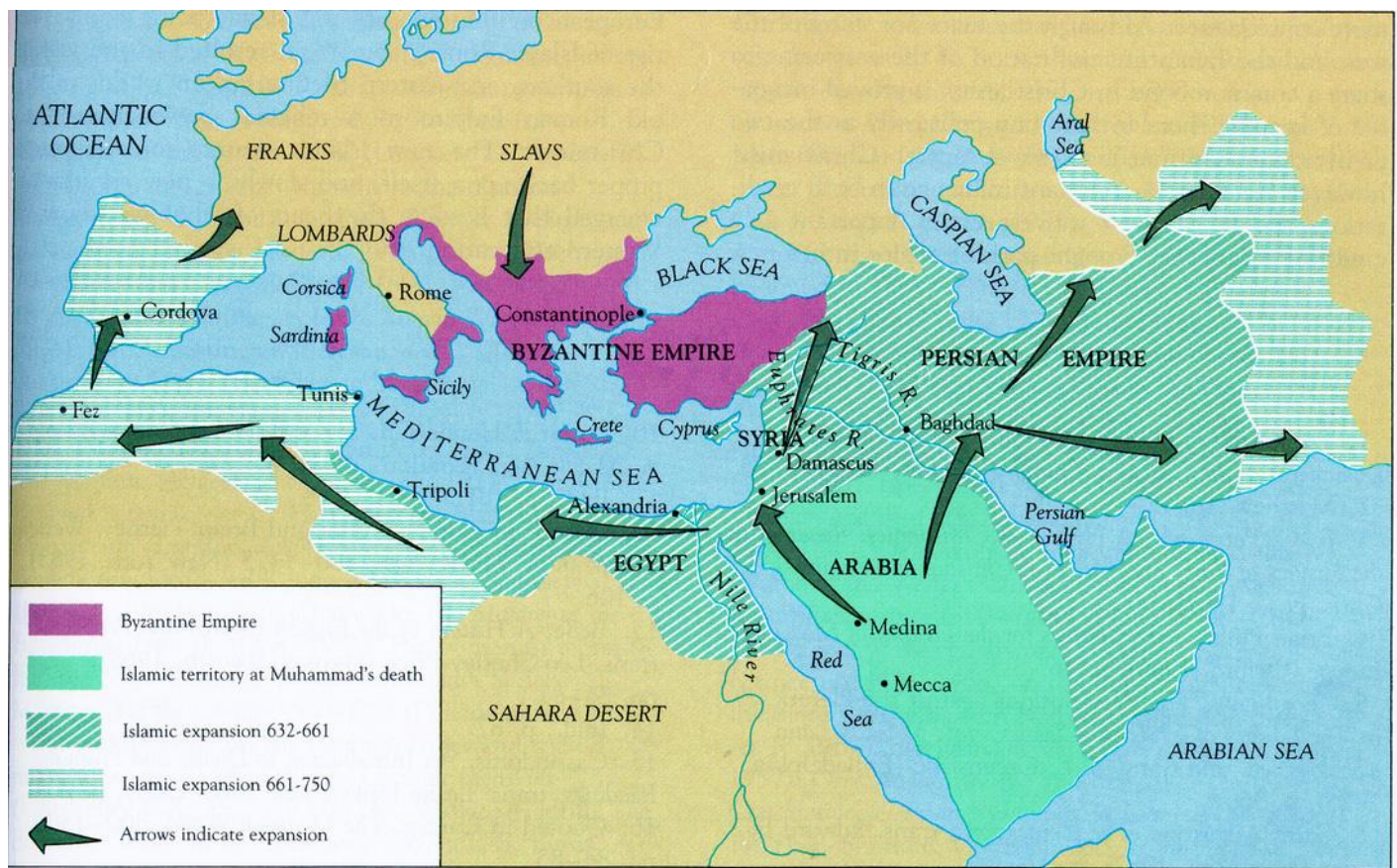
In 610 A.D. he felt divinely inspired to proclaim his newfound faith (not yet named). But, after listening to him for three years he had 12 converts and was kicked out of Mecca. He fled to Medina and continued to spread his newfound faith. By 630 A.D. he had enough converts to return to Mecca and capture the city and make it his. In two years he would die, but not before raising an army that soon be let out to “proselytize” the world in the name of Islam.

- 1) 640 A.D. the Mosque of Omar was built in Jerusalem.
- 2) By 650 A.D. both Persia and Egypt had become under the control of the Muslim invaders.
- 3) By 732 A.D. Syria was also taken over.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.medievalists.net/2015/07/how-christianity-came-to-europe/> 08/13/2020





- 4) "The crescent-shaped expansion to the West and East threatened Christianity with great pincers (claws), but expansion at the eastern end of the crescent was stopped by the brave defense of the Eastern empire under Leo the Isaurian in 717 and 718. Muslim expansion on the Western wing of the crescent was halted by the defeat of the Muslims by the army of Charles Martel at Tours in 732. But the church had already undergone great losses as the conquered people were faced with the choice of the sword, tribute, or Islam."<sup>4</sup>
- At the time of the Islamic conquest of the mid-7th century, the populations of Mesopotamia and Assyria (Iraq, north east Syria, south east Turkey and Kuwait), Syria, Phoenicia (Lebanon and coastal Syria), Egypt, Jordan, North Africa (Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Algeria), Asia Minor (Turkey) and Armenia were predominantly Christian and non-Arab.
  - The church, once again, was under outside pressures to either conform, pay or die.
  - All non-Muslims were immediately dropped to a lesser social status and Christians in particular were banned from sharing the gospel in any land that the Muslims had conquered, owning any weapons and limited in which careers they could pursue. Not following these orders was punishable by death.
  - Once they enacted sharia, all non-Muslims were forced to pay several taxes and Christians were sought out and charged more so their rulers could fund various military campaigns.
    - By doing this, most Christians in these lands were reduced to abject poverty and thus were forced to convert to Islam.

<sup>4</sup> Cairns Earle E. *Christianity Through the Centuries* p. 173

- ii) If they did not pay the tax or convert, they were forced to give over their children for payment. The government would then sell their children to other Muslims for slave labor. The children would then be put into Muslim schools and converted.
  - e) Christians lost all legal and civil standing. They could not bring a charge against a Muslim, as the Christian's word meant nothing in the Muslim court.
  - f) Muslim women could not wed Christian men, but Muslim men could wed Christian women. This was done in hopes of converting them but also the wife was then seen simply as a slave.
  - g) Christians were free to leave their religion, but if anyone (even non-Muslim) converted to Christianity, they would be killed.
  - h) The Muslims forbade Christians from publicly displaying the cross on church buildings, summoning congregants to prayer with a bell, re-building or repairing churches and monasteries after they had been destroyed or damaged.
- 5) Christianity had gone from the darling of the government to almost completely wiped off the face of the earth. The Eastern church was not known for missionary activity, as the Western was. Not only were they fighting off Muslim hordes, but they were trying to prove themselves not to be idol worshippers.
- a) One of the key differences in the RCC and the Eastern Orthodox is the placement of icons. This was an issue then, and still today, in the Eastern Orthodox church.
    - i) The Iconoclasts (those who rejected images) objected to **icon worship** for several reasons, including the Old Testament prohibition against images in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4) and the possibility of idolatry.
    - ii) The defenders of the use of icons insisted on the **symbolic nature** of images and on the dignity of created matter.
      - (1) Even today, this is still an issue in the broader church. Should there be pictures of historical religious people (Jesus, Paul, other saints, etc.) in homes, churches and other places?
  - b) Looking ahead to 1453 A.D., Islam would finally wipe out the Eastern Church and put them under their control.
- 6) Early Islam found its home in Bagdad and settled down and began a civilization. Islam was not just a religion, but a way of life.
- a) Everything the Muslims did (do) is centered around the will of their god Allah. To be Arabic was (is) to be a Muslim.

The Muslims brutal and forceful taking of Christians land, property, money and freedom resulted in Christianity becoming more militarized. Though we can look back to Augustine and read that he advocated defense of one's self, but only out of necessity. The vast majority of Christianity, up until the 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, were pacifists.

With their constant struggles against the Muslims, Christians had to decide if they were going to simply allow them to take whatever they wanted, or if they were going to fight back. Christianity had made its way into the military and many had begun to see the church as a military power. This is now laying the seed which would soon begin to bloom into what is known as the Crusades. The Muslim hordes had taken almost every ancient Christian city and now controlled the believers who were left in them.

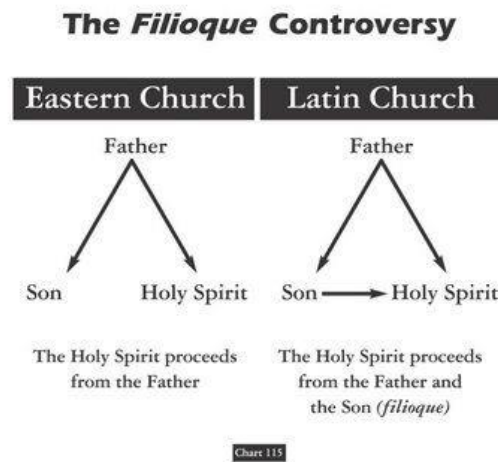
## The Coronation of Charlemagne (800 A.D. – 814 A.D.)

- 1) The greatest perceived need in the church was to have unity among all the fractioned areas around the Roman Empire.
  - a) The unity that Charlemagne advocated for was the motivation and inspiration for two future rulers, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) and Adolf Hitler (1889-1945). Both of these leaders sought after the same thing that Charlemagne did, unity of all of Europe.
- 2) It was Christmas Day, 800 AD that the catholic church became ***The Holy Roman Empire***.
  - a) *Over the next 700 years, the Roman Catholic Church would be on a rampage until finally Martin Luther inadvertently started the Protestant Reformation.*
  - b) Charlemagne not only expanded the empire back to its former size, but he also enlarged it. He did so by using the same tactics that the Muslim hordes did, the power of the sword.
  - c) He used baptism as a means of submission. When his armies conquered a land, those who did not turn to Christianity and get baptized, were murdered.
    - i) The reason for baptism was it showed allegiance to the one true God. By these pagans being baptized, they were essentially turning their backs on their multiple gods and presumably coming under the God of the Bible.
    - ii) These people were not *Christians* but rather they were *Christianized*. This is why it is called *The Holy Roman Empire*, they were not concerned with the conversion of souls but with the submission of people into conformity with the empire.





- 3) Pope Leo III, at St. Peter's church in Rome, crowned Charles, the King of the Franks as Emperor. One witness said, "the venerable holy pontiff with his own hands crowned Charles with a most precious crown." The Roman crowd responded "To Charles Augustus, crowned by God, great and peace-giving emperor of the Romans, life and victory."
  - a) After his crowning, the people revered him, here is an example of a letter sent to him "Our Lord Jesus Christ has set you up as the ruler of the Christian people, in power more excellent than the pope or the emperor of Constantinople, in wisdom more distinguished, in the dignity of your rule more sublime. On you alone depends the whole safety of the churches of Christ."
  - b) He gave money and protection to the popes and bishops, restored the churches lands and promoted education and cultural restoration.
- 4) His exalted view of himself led him into many direct conflicts with popes. Because he believed that he was empowered by God to be the supreme ruler of Christianity, he saw the popes as subjected to him.
  - a) "Charlemagne also sanctioned the insertion of the filioque clause into the Nicene Creed, over the head of pope Leo III's opposition, so that the creed now read that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father ***"and from the Son."***"<sup>5</sup>
  - b) The Eastern church protested passionately at this unilateral alteration of an ecumenical creed by a Western emperor, but to no avail. It was to have fateful consequences, contributing to the eventual break-up of East and West into separate and mutually hostile churches in 1054."<sup>6</sup>



- 5) Jesus said in John 3:34 "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure."
- 6) He also said in John 16:7 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."
  - a) In theological terms, we say that He is both co-equal and co-eternal. It was both the Father and the Son who would send the Spirit and the He came and acted, as it were, for both of Them.
  - b) So the activity of the Spirit is never given to us in Scripture in isolation from the person and work of Christ or in isolation from the eternal will of the Father.

<sup>5</sup> TableTalk Magazine July 2008

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

- 7) Charlemagne was never recognized as a *saint* by the RCC but is credited with being the father of Christianity in the Western Empire.
- 8) The fruit of his conquests are seen today throughout all of Europe. Many still today turn away from Christianity, seeing it as a political or military scheme. Even Luther's Reformation could not stop the influence that Charlemagne had on people.

### **The Gottschalkian Controversy (803 A.D. – 869 A.D.)**

- 1) By the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, almost all of the church had forgotten about Augustinian's teachings regarding man, sin and salvation. The church was predominately Pelagian / Semi-Pelagian in belief.
- 2) Amid the swirling controversies of the ninth century, there was raised a strong voice for sovereign grace belonging to an unknown German monk named Gottschalk of Orbais (NE. France). Like Augustine before him and Luther and Calvin after him, Gottschalk possessed an overriding sense of the sovereignty of God in salvation, and he brought it to bear upon his turbulent generation. It was in this dark hour of history that this medieval theologian stood in the gap to uphold the banner of the doctrines of grace.<sup>7</sup>
- 3) Of noble Saxon origin, Gottschalk was made a ward of the Benedictine abbey at Fulda (now in Germany). As he grew older he came to resent his condition and sought his freedom.
  - a) Although his release was resisted by his abbot, a synod at Mainz (829) granted it. His abbot then appealed the decision to Frankish emperor Louis. Gottschalk was compelled to return to a monastery at Orbais in Gaul where he was unofficially ordained a priest.
  - b) Because the church would not release him, it became his rivalry until his death.
- 4) Gottschalk became an avid reader of Augustine and began to clearly see the biblical truths of inseparable relationships between human depravity, unconditional election and monergistic regeneration.
  - a) Immediately, these grand truths struck his soul like a lightning bolt, igniting his heart with a burning passion for God. Far from being a mere intellectual pursuit, these God-exalting doctrines transformed his life, infusing him with holy zeal.<sup>8</sup>
- 5) Gottschalk began to travel extensively, preaching these truths wherever he went.
  - a) Soon other monks were convinced to embrace them. The doctrines of sovereign grace now had a new champion. He undertook a pilgrimage to Rome and spread Augustinian teaching throughout Italy, the Balkans and Bulgaria; but not without conflict.
- 6) He was Summoned to appear before the Synod of Mainz (848), and he was to give an account of his bold teaching on the doctrines of grace.
  - a) Before the king and church officials, he confessed his unwavering belief in the sovereignty of God in salvation. He stated his doctrine was true to the Scriptures and consistent with Augustine.
  - b) But the synod decided against Gottschalk and delivered him into the custody of the most powerful bishop in France, the archbishop of Reims, a man named Hincmar (ca. 806–882).
- 7) Gottschalk appeared again before the Synod of Chiersy (849) where he was charged with heresy. Specifically, he was accused of double predestination, a step in which he went even further than his teacher Augustine.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/gottschalk/> 08/14/2020

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

- a) Not only did God eternally predestine His elect to eternal life, Gottschalk maintained that He also foreordained all reprobates to eternal death.
  - i) When Gottschalk refused to recant, the synod charged him a heretic and flogged him within an inch of his life.
  - ii) His books were publicly burned and he was imprisoned at Hautvilliers (NE France).
- 8) He had many respected churchmen taking this strong stand with him. Because of that, this controversy boiled to a massive church argument.
  - a) At the insistence of the king of Francia, the Synod of Chiersy (849) was convened to sort out this theological dilemma.
  - b) Tragically, this ill-led session adopted a semi-Pelagian position, and Gottschalk remained imprisoned for the next two decades, where he would die.
- 9) To the end, Gottschalk maintained a deep conviction as to God's sovereignty. The truths of sovereign grace were both the cause of his suffering and his comfort in suffering. Many joined with Gottschalk in testifying to those truths, but he alone was persecuted as a heretical teacher, as the opposition felt he alone was dangerous to their church system. But though his enemies assailed him, Gottschalk has been vindicated by champions of the faith as a martyr to the truth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid