

FOUNDED UPON THE ROCK: PART III: THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIAN EUROPE

I. In the early Middle Ages, the focus shifted from the centrality of Greek and Roman civilization to the formation of new cultures, the new nations of Europe, the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic civilization.

A. During the classical era, from about the fifth century B.C. to about the early sixth century A.D., the area around the Mediterranean Sea was in many ways united, first by Greek culture and then by the Roman Empire (with other empires, such as the that of Egypt and Carthage in competition.)

B. The division was thus not between what we would consider Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. For the Mediterranean Sea was not so much of a barrier as a means of transportation between the various nations of the Mediterranean. The harsher lands to the north, the desert to the south and in Arabia, and the borders of the eastern empires were more of a barrier separating what was considered classical civilization from others. There were the barbarian lands to the north, the Parthian and Persian Empires to the east, Ethiopia and some vague notion of nations to the south, and legends about magical lands to the west over the Atlantic.

C. But in the early Middle Ages, Christianity was central to the formation of new nations in Europe. The nations to the west tended to stay with the Latin tradition associated with Rome. The nations of eastern Europe (with the notable exception of Poland) tended to be go with the eastern tradition associated more with the Byzantine Empire. And then, in the High Middle Ages, the eastern traditions would separate formally from the Catholic Church and become the Orthodox churches. And most of what we consider to be North Africa and the Middle East (along with most of Spain for the time being) became Muslim. Eventually, there would be divisions within the Muslim world, with Egypt and the rest of northern Africa dominated mostly by the Sultan of Egypt and what we now call the Middle East dominated more by the Sultan of Bagdad, and Spain largely on its own. These religious differences mostly defined the division between Europe, on the one hand, and north Africa and the Middle East on the other.

D. In Europe, the former barbarian tribes gradually became Christian and formed new nations. Islam spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and into parts of Europe. And the Byzantine Empire fought for its life, gradually recovered and sent missionaries to eastern Europe, often with dramatic success.

E. During the early Middle Ages, Christianity was not formally divided, although the western Latin tradition did develop in its way and different eastern traditions developed in their way, leading to the Latin and 22 Eastern rites in the Catholic Church, and the 21 different Orthodox Churches.

II. Even as the western Roman Empire collapsed, there were developments in mission work and monasteries that would lead to the conversion of Europe.

A. In 430, even as St. Augustine lay dying in his city of Hippo in Northern Africa with the Vandals at the gates, a priest named Patricius (now known as St. Patrick) was planning a mission to Ireland. In 432, he and his fellow monks went to Ireland and brought about dramatic conversions there, with the island becoming almost entirely Christian by the year 500.

1. Patrick had been the son of an upper middle class family in the Roman province of Britannia, when raiders attacked his village, captured him, and sold him as a slave in Ireland. After six years, he made a dramatic escape, returned to his family now in Gaul, and was ordained a priest. His experience of Ireland put him in an ideal position to lead the conversion of that land, for he knew the Celtic language and culture very well.

2. Patrick and his fellow monks established monasteries in the small kingdoms that ruled throughout Ireland. (Tara was the most prominent kingdom, but there was no universal leader of the island or even of any large part of it.) Their self-discipline and hope of eternal life were very persuasive to the Irish people.

3. One of the new Irish monks, Columkille, as penance for starting a small war prepared a mission to convert thousands of pagans in the sixth century. Since Ireland was already mostly Christian, he went to Scotland with his monks, again with astonishing success. The monastery he established on the island of Iona would become legendary.

B. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the former barbarian tribes gradually accepted Christianity, and formed the beginnings of the European nations.

1. In 496 Clovis, the King of the Franks, whose wife Clotilda was already Christian, himself converted to the faith and brought his nation with him.

2. In 589, Ricard, the king of the Visigoths in Spain, who had been Arian, also became Catholic and brought most of that land with him

3. In 596, Pope St. Gregory the Great (590-606) sent St. Augustine of Canterbury to England with his troop of Benedictine monks. He received the help of the king of the Franks, and the pagan king Ethelbert and the Christian queen St. Bertha of Kent in southeastern England. With this assistance, and with great perseverance and efforts, he and his monks met with enormous success, particularly when King Ethelbert also became Christian.

4. The monk and bishop Winifred, later known as St. Boniface, went into what is now Germany with a number of Benedictine monks in the early 700s and converted most of the people in that area. With these and other efforts, one by one, the barbarian tribes became Christian; and Christianity became even more a part of Europe than it had been.

C. The practice of private, regular confession also spread throughout Europe, starting in Ireland.

1. Before their time, confession was reserved for only particularly serious sins, such as murder, adultery, and apostasy. And penance for these sins was very severe, often including exclusion from the liturgy and many other aspects of life for years. The idea was that the Church had to prevent scandal and moral laxity.

2. The Irish monks encouraged much more regular confession, for more everyday sins; and they imposed lighter, private penances. The practice led to our modern use of this sacrament.

III. The monastic movement was responsible for much of both the missionary work of the Church and was invaluable the preservation of classical learning and the promotion of stability.

A. The idea of going off and living away from the world began quite early, but increased in the third and fourth centuries. St. Anthony of the desert, who lived for over a hundred years in the third and early fourth century, became known as the father of western monasticism. St. Athanasius, who was the central fourth century theologian in defending the truth about the Incarnation, had been a novice with him early in life. And, when St. Athanasius became world renown, he wrote The Life of St. Anthony, which helped monasticism to become vastly more popular as a way of seeking refuge from the world. Many of the Church's great figures from that era, such as St. Augustine, St. Jerome and St. John Chrysostom were for a time monks.

B. At first monks were only loosely organized. But gradually, in the East and the West, rules for monks were developed; and the monks themselves began writing extensive Scriptural and theological commentary.

1. In the east, St. Pachomius (287-346) wrote a highly respected rule that emphasized order and moderation, with a number of monks (or later nuns) living in houses near each other. Soon thereafter, St. Basil the Great (329-379) wrote the most influential rule in the east. At first, he was a monk and set out to establish a clear rule for monasteries. He would eventually become the Bishop of Ceaserea in Asia Minor. And in that role, he was prominent in defending the true faith against the semi-Arian heresy. Although he died before the Council of Constantinople in 381, his influence was felt especially through his friend St. Gregory Nazianzen, whom he helped arrange to be the Bishop of Constantinople.

2. In the west, St. Augustine likewise wrote a rule for monks. And with his theological influence, that rule became prominent and guides the Augustinian order to this day.

3. The Irish monks also had a rule of life that involved very harsh disciplines, such as praying for long periods of time in cold water and lengthy fasts. These heroic practices impressed a warrior culture, but did not always work elsewhere. On the other hand, many monasteries in wealthier lands had little organization

and rule of life, and thus often fell apart.

4. The most influential rule in the west was drafted by St. Benedict (circa 480-540), who was the co-founder of the Benedictine order, with his twin sister St. Scholastica founding the women's side of the order.

a. They were born into a noble family in Norcia, Italy amidst collapse of Roman Empire in the West. St. Benedict was academically gifted, but wanted to be a hermit and work on his spiritual perfection away from the world. However, other people, who also sought spiritual advancement, found him, and he was widely sought after as a spiritual guide.

b. After an unsuccessful attempt to lead a group of monks, St. Benedict wrote his Rule about the year 520. His sister St. Scholastica, whom St. Benedict said was the much holier of the two, likewise founded convents for women along similar lines.

c. The Rule governing the Benedictine order soon became the most prominent monastic rule in the West. Thus, for example, when the Irish monks who were evangelizing England from the north met up with the Benedictine monks who were evangelizing England from the south, a local council at Whitby decided that the Benedictine rule would govern England. In the ninth century, the Emperor Charlemagne made the Benedictine rule standard in his realms.

C. The monks performed numerous roles in the early Middle Ages that would help resettle Europe as a Christian civilization.

1. The monks emphasized a simplicity and order of life to govern the monasteries and convents, an order that would bring about peace in a chaotic world.

2. There was an emphasis on combining work and prayer, with a particular focus on studying the Scriptures in general and the psalms in particular. The steady effort helped re-cultivate farmland that had fallen into disuse; and the prayerfulness gave a sense of the divine on earth.

3. One of the works of monks was also copying out old texts, a service that helped preserve many of the works of Greece and Rome, which would otherwise have been lost.

4. Because of their unity and determination, the monks were ideally suited to set up lasting missions in pagan lands.

IV. As the western Roman Empire decline, the papacy became more prestigious, for it was the source of order and unity, although the Popes had to struggle to keep their independence.

A. The most famous Pope (and Benedictine monk) of the early Middle Ages was Pope St. Gregory the Great (590-606), who defended the Church and helped establish

Christianity in Western Europe.

1. He was a learned statesman and eventually became the prefect (a sort of mayor) of Rome at a time when the city had declined dramatically.
2. He left that position to be a monk at a new monastery he established in Rome. But because of his talents, Pope Pelagius II sent him to be the papal ambassador to Constantinople. Shortly after he returned to his monastery, Pope Pelagius died and Gregory was elected Pope.
3. The Lombards had settled in Northern Italy and were threatening Rome and all the rest of Italy. Plague and famine had also broken out in central Italy. And the eastern emperor was of little help, for he was at continual war with the Persian Empire further east and had less and less success against the barbarians
4. After much prayer, the plague came to an astonishing end. Gregory was able to arrange food shipments from the eastern lands of Italy. He also negotiated with the Lombard king to keep him away and increased contact with the kings of the Franks and the Visigoths. When the situation stabilized, he sent Saint Augustine to England to convert that nation; and he encouraged others to engage in missionary activity.
5. Early into the papacy, he wrote The Rule of Pastoral Care, a guide for bishops and pastors. That Rule would become the guiding text for pastoral ministry in the western Church.

B. As the sixth and seventh century wore on, the Popes were the only stable influence in most of Italy. Meanwhile, they kept trying to maintain alliances with the kings of the Visigoths in Spain, the Lombards in Italy, the Franks in what is now France, and the various kings in Ireland, Scotland and England. The difficulties in communication and transportation, however, made direct and control over the bishops and the local churches difficult.

C. In the east, after the death of Justinian, the Byzantine Empire struggled against both the Persian Empire in the east and the overall difficulty in maintaining control northern Africa and their possessions in Italy.

V. Suddenly, in the sixth century, the religion of Islam was established and came to dominate the Middle East and North Africa. In the seventh century, the forces of Islam even threatened the very existence of the Byzantine Empire.

A. A merchant from a prosperous family named Mohammad (570-633) believed he had visions from heaven to establish the new religion; the Koran is the official record of these visions. He lived in Arabia and was surrounded by pagan religions that were gradually becoming discredited. And with the Byzantine and Persian Empires much weakened by their wars, there was a spiritual and political void. Muhammed took full advantage of the occasion and had some success gaining converts during his lifetime, starting in the city of

Medina in 622, which is year 1 in the Muslim calendar.

B. And after his lifetime, especially under the influence of his successor Caliph Omar, Islam spread with astonishing speed. The rest of the Persian Empire collapsed under it. Arabia, Syria, and Egypt were all Muslim by 644 and soon all of North Africa was as well. The area around Jerusalem remained Christian, but was isolated.

C. The new caliphate besieged the city of Constantinople itself in 718. The city held out and repulsed the invaders, largely with the use of "Greek fire" that burned Muslim ships. But the empire was vastly weakened.

D. The Muslims meanwhile moved into Spain and conquered most of that peninsula, which they called the kingdom of Al-Andalus. The Visigothic kingdom collapsed, although some Christians held out in what is now northern Portugal and Spain.

E. The Muslim forces then swept into France. They were finally stopped at Tours in southern France in 732 by the armies of Charles Martel, who was the Mayor of the Palace (essentially the chief of staff) for the Frankish king.

VI. This victory by the Franks helped lead to the rise of the Carolingian dynasty and the Holy Roman Empire.

A. The kings of the Franks, descendants of Clovis, were also generally weak figures by the eighth century; and powerful Frankish nobles increased in prestige and influence. The Frankish chiefs of staff, called Mayors of the Palace, were increasingly in charge of what was left of the court of the Kings of the Franks. Due to the threats of the Muslims, as well as the overall chaos in society, there was an increased need for a strong national leader; and the Mayors of the Palace began taking more and more in charge.

B. In 750, the Pope recognized Charles Martel's son, Pepin as the true king in about 750. He in turn conquered the Lombards of northern Italy, who were still threatening Rome; and they also became Christian.

C. One of Pepin's son was named Charles, or as we know him now, Charles the Great or Charlemagne. He eventually became the most powerful monarch in the early Middle Ages, and would be the model of kings for centuries thereafter.

1. Once he gained sole control of the Frankish kingdom, Charlemagne extended his kingdom to all of France, modern day Germany, northern Italy, northern Spain, and parts of eastern Europe.

2. To help the Pope maintain independence, he declared that central Italy was the realm of the Pope. That land would come to be known as the Papal States.

3. Charlemagne was a devout Christian and an effective leader. As ruler, he emphasized the rule of law and education, reduced squabbling among local nobles, and enabled much greater trade than had been known in Europe for centuries.

The capital of his kingdom Aachen, in modern day northwestern Germany, became the center of scholarship in Europe. The decades surrounding Charlemagne's rule have thus become known as the Carolingian renaissance.

4. In the year 800, Charlemagne brought his army to Rome and gave Pope Leo III crucial assistance in retaining control of the city when rebels threatened to overthrow and kill him. Then, in St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas Day 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, "by the grace of God, Emperor of the Romans." Thus began the new Holy Roman Empire, which would last in one way or another for another 1000 years.

- Charlemagne himself did not use the title as much, and only eventually agreed that it would be hereditary. But his advisors and his people very much supported the idea of restoring the vision of a Christian Roman Empire in the west.

VII. There was a short time of peace and prosperity in western and central Europe, but it eventually faded under the Viking attacks and the overall decline of civil rule.

A. After Charlemagne's death, his sons divided the realm into three parts, with the eastern part roughly modern day France, the western part most of modern day Germany, and a central part in between that would continue to be called the Holy Roman Empire.

- The tradition among the Franks was to divide the kingdom among male heirs, which led to further divisions of the kingdoms, although there would also be combinations due to marriages and other alliances. The Holy Roman Empire thus became only the loose confederation of realms, who sometimes fought among themselves, and with neighboring kingdoms.

B. Likewise, in England and Ireland, there was no united kingdom. The mainland of England had four main kings, although even together they did not control all of the land. That situation paradoxically did lead to an increased prestige of the monasteries and of the Church.

C. Then a new threat arose in the north as the Vikings began their raids, threatening all of western and northern Europe.

1. The Vikings were a people from Scandinavia who were loosely organized, but also fiercely loyal to family ties. They developed excellent and versatile ships and strong fighting skills.

2. They began raiding England and Ireland in the eighth century and the mainland of Europe in the 830s, and no authorities seemed able to stop them.

3. The Frankish kings at times tried to make them allies or even give them areas so that they would be more civilized. That effort led to the settlement of Normandy in France.

4. In England, King Alfred the Great (871-899), the king of Wessex, gained great

fame and prestige by fighting off the Vikings, and at times making agreements with them. His prestige would make his kingdom of Wessex the centerpiece of the developing country of England.

5. The Vikings also settled in southern Italy and Spain and establish there the kingdom of the Normans (Norsemen.)

6. The Viking raids eventually ended as the Vikings themselves became Christian and began to cultivate the regions they controlled. For example, St. Olaf King of Sweden (980-1022) and St. Olaf King of Norway (995-1030) both converted to Christianity and were killed in part because of their attempt to bring Christianity to those nations; after their deaths, their efforts then bore great fruit in those nations. Meanwhile, King Cnut of Norway, (990-1035) conquered England and later became King of Norway; and in these roles very much supported the Church and, despite some personal vices, became a model for Christian kings. Thus, far from destroying Christianity in Europe, the Vikings by becoming Christian brought the faith further north.

D. In Rome, the Popes also had many struggles for independence with the nobility, who were often more interested in worldly power and prestige than in holiness.

1. Powerful Roman families, who had more interest in using the Popes and cardinals for their own gain than for that of the Church, tried to gain influence.

2. Increasing rivalries also caused strife. For example, in 896. Pope Stephen VII had his predecessor Pope Formosus (who was of a rival family) dug out of his grave, tried for misconduct and convicted in what became known as the Cadaver Synod. The next Pope, Leo V, retried Pope Formosus, acquitted him, and reburied him.

3. Other Popes were attacked and sometimes murdered by rival families. Meanwhile, the absence of strong leadership in Rome and in many nations made clerical discipline and learning much more difficult.

VIII. The Pope and the eastern bishops and emperor did, however, help promote the faith, although they also had some disputes.

A. From the early 6th century to the late 8th century, there was little contact between East and West due to the difficulties of travel and communication.

B. As peace began to be restored, the two sides of the Church came into contact more. The discussions were sometimes fruitful. For example, when the iconoclastic heresy, a view that forbade images portraying God or the angels or saints, bishops in the east and west joined together for the Second Council of Nicea in 787 and affirmed the theology of sacred images.

B. Saints Cyril and Methodius received support from both sides as they prepared for the

evangelization of the Slavic nations, which involved creating a written alphabet (called the Cyrillic alphabet) to teach the faith. Cyril died in 869, but in the 870s St. Methodius and his monks entered the Slavic nations of eastern Europe and brought the faith there with very quick success.

C. Most of the nations of eastern Europe joined the eastern traditions of Christianity and developed their traditions. However, in 966 King Mieszko I of Poland became Catholic and joined the western tradition of Christianity, partially due to the influence of his wife Dobrawa. With him, most of the nobles joined the Catholic Church and with the m the Polish nation would soon predominately Catholic and a link between east and west.

D. Several tribes, including many Vikings, eventually established a nation known as Kiev Rus, which consisted of most of modern day Ukraine and the western part of modern day Russia. Thier most powerful monarch, King Vladimir (980-1015) decided that the nation would become eastern Christian; and his decree was basically successful, with the result that Russia and Ukraine are mostly Orthodox Christian to this day.

E. As trade and communication increased, there were some disputes between the Papacy and the eastern bishops.

1. The issue almost came to a head with the Photian controversy.

a. In 858, the Byzantine Emperor deposed Patriarch Ignatius of Constantinople on grounds of misconduct and replaced him with Photius.

b. Pope Nicholas I opposed this move. He did not necessarily disagree with replacing Ignatius, but it had been done without his consent; and Photius was also denying final papal authority. Thus, a dispute arose over who was the legitimate patriarch.

c. After about 20 years, the issue was resolved after Ignatius died. The Pope recognized Photius; for his part Photius and other representatives agreed that the Pope was essential for defending the faith. The sides likely understood that idea in different ways, but for now the dispute was resolved.

2. Another dispute arose over the Nicene Creed.

a. The old Nicene Creed had said only that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. During Charlemagne's reign, it became popular in the West to include the words "and the Son" to indicate that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Pope approved of the change; and it gradually became the standard in the West.

b. But eastern bishops disagreed with the change. Some said that the new formula was wrong. Other bishops said that it could be read as legitimate, but they still maintained that the Pope could not authorize additions to the Creed without an ecumenical council. The issue was never quite resolved.

But as communications between east and West diminished again in the tenth century, it faded for a time.

IX. In western Europe, feudalism was increasing taking hold in society, and was having a large influence in the Church and in church state relations.

A. Feudalism gradually arose in the ninth and tenth century as a system that tried to reestablish society on the basis of a hierarchy of nobles and commoners, who were all bound together by oaths and a commitment to the land. It was basically an attempt to reestablish order in a society that desperately needed it in the face of declining security. And, for all of its inequality, it did largely accomplish that end. The highly structured institutions of obligations between the various levels of nobility, fighters, and commoners recreated a more stable order and better defenses for nations, towns, and lands.

B. Otto I, the Holy Roman Emperor from 936 to 973, came up with the idea of incorporating the clerical hierarchy as lords in the feudal order. He thought that this arrangement would benefit both sides.

1. On the one hand the king would have nobles who presumably took their oaths very seriously and had at least more moderate lifestyles than many of the other feudal nobles. In addition, because bishops, abbots and most priests were celibate, a clerical lord would not have descendants who may grow in power and challenge the king.

2. For the Church, this arrangement gave her more stability and a stronger position in society. And a good king could help maintain church discipline.

3. However, a central problem was that, when bishops and other clergy were also nobles, they had a divided loyalty, partially to the Pope and partially to the king. In addition, religious controversies often became political ones, involving political and military tactics not really fitting for a religion based upon the idea that one should seek first the kingdom of God. Furthermore, the qualities of a useful noble and a good bishop were different, a fact that would lead to some appointments that were not a good idea for one side or the other.

C. Under the Holy Roman Emperors Otto I, II and III and St. Henry II, who together ruled until 1002, this system increased in influence and was generally respected as helpful to both sides. And other European kings, particularly in France and England, likewise employed this system. For the time the benefits of increased order and unity seemed to be strong. And so the situation led to greater peace and order for about 100 years.

D. There were also reform efforts within the Church.

1. For example, in 910 a noble founded a Benedictine monastery in Cluny, which he wanted to get back to the original Benedictine discipline. Under its second abbot, Odo, the monastery not only succeeded in that goal, but attracted the notice of other monasteries, who put themselves under the general authority of Cluny in order to have better discipline themselves. Thus began the Cluniac reform effort, which included 2000 monasteries by the year 1100.

2. Along similar lines, the Cistercian order was founded in 1098 to get back to the old monastic discipline of a simple lifestyle and extensive prayers each day. The Cistercians were also very successful both in recruiting members and obtaining land from nobles who were only too happy to have it worked by such an orderly group of people. There were 600 such Cistercian monasteries within 50 years after the order was founded.

3. The German Emperors, along with other monarchs, were also promoting clerical reform. This effort reached Rome and, starting in the in the 11th century, as the Roman noble families gradually lost influence, and more capable Popes were taking office. In 1059, Pope Nicolas II established the rule that only cardinals could vote for the Pope, which heavily diminished outside influence. The next Pope elected was a Cluniac monk named Hildebrand, who took the name Gregory VII.

E. However, this very success led to issues of control. With greater discipline and prestige, as well as the restoration of much of society, the Popes wanted full authority over the appointment of bishops and over Church affairs generally.

1. Thus, a conflict arose between Gregory VII and the German Emperor Henry IV over who controlled papal elections.

a. The resulting clash led to Gregory VII's excommunication of Henry IV, which in turn many nobles used as an occasion for a rebellion.

b. When Henry IV was about to be overthrown, he came to Gregory VII at a castle in Canossa and begged for his forgiveness. The Pope lifted the excommunication and Henry IV returned and put down the rebellion.

c. But when he was more secure in his throne, Henry IV reinvaded Italy and forced the Pope to turn to the Normans for help. The Normans successfully defended him. However, they then looted the city of Rome and thus made Pope Gregory VII very unpopular there. The result was that, when the Normans left, he had to depart with them, and died in exile.

d. Meanwhile, Henry IV's own sons also conspired to overthrow him.

e. Gregory VII's personal holiness and internal church reform, in contrast to the court intrigues of the German Emperors, increased the prestige of the papacy as the eleventh century progressed.

2. This issue of who controls the appointment of bishops (and abbots and abbesses) also spread to other countries and became known as the investiture controversy. Overall, the local clergy, or some portion of them, would be able to have a fair amount of control of the appointment of bishops, as monks and nuns were for their abbots and abbesses. The kings and nobles also had influence to varying degrees. But the Popes always insisted that all appointments of bishops, abbots and abbesses required their approval.