

## ***Church History—Before the Reformation***

### ***I. The Beginning of the Church of the New Covenant***

#### ***A. Relationship to Judaism***

For a long time after the death of Christ, the Christian church functioned as another sect of Judaism, and by doing so, received the same protection of Roman law provided for the Jews. They continued to worship in the Temple as well as celebrate the Lord's Supper and administer baptism as the sign of the new covenant. They also still recognized the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law and observed circumcision. Even after Peter's revelation concerning Cornelius (Acts 11), it was apparently not clear to the Jewish Christians that Gentiles would have equal standing with Jewish Christians making it unnecessary for Gentiles to "become Jews" before becoming Christians. Peter himself was a little "fuzzy" in his thinking on this issue until the Apostle Paul made things clear to him and to everyone else in the first church council, the Council at Jerusalem in 49 AD (Acts 15; cf. Gal. 2: 11-14). In that council it was decided that the Jewish Christians would not place the yoke of the Mosaic Law upon the Gentile believers which even the Jews themselves had not been able to bear (Acts 15: 10).

#### ***B. The Spread of Christianity outward from Jerusalem***

Jesus had given the apostles their "marching orders" before His ascension by telling them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and unto the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1: 8), but it took considerable time before they embraced the missionary vision of their Lord. For some time the Christian faith remained hemmed-in by Jerusalem and the traditions of Judaism, and not until the martyrdom of Stephen which instigated the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem did the disciples of Christ (excluding the apostles) move outward to other areas of Judea and Samaria taking the gospel with them (Acts 8: 1). We are informed in Acts 11: 19 that the Christian church of Syrian Antioch was planted at this time, not by one of the apostles, but by unnamed Christians fleeing the persecution in Jerusalem. Fleeing persecution, if possible, was also one of Jesus' instructions to the twelve. If they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to the next (Matt. 10: 23). If at all possible they were to stay alive in order to preach the gospel another day and in another place; martyrdom was not to be sought for its own sake.

Along with the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom, another major contributor to the severance (separation) of Christianity from Judaism and the resulting expansion of the church was the Jewish War with Rome from 66-70 AD, ending with the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus of Rome and the destruction of the Jewish temple. Jesus had warned His church that this would happen (Matt. 24: 2; 15-21), and following His instructions, the Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella across the Jordan before Titus sacked the city. In this way, the church disassociated itself from Jewish nationalism and its rebellion against Rome. Having no temple, the Jews continued to propagate Judaism in the time-honored institution of the synagogue established throughout the Mediterranean world during the exile, but Jewish Christians were no longer welcome because of their retreat into Pella during the war. Little by little, God was distinguishing His church from apostate Israel which had rejected His messiah, and He would use martyrdom and war to accomplish this end. By AD 70, the Jewish church in Jerusalem had dwindled to a very small number of believers, and the center of Christianity had moved from Jerusalem to Antioch, the

capital of the Syrian Province of Rome (Pillay and Hofmeyr, *Perspectives on Church History*, p. 3).

It was in Antioch where believers first received the name “Christians”, a name of derision (ridicule) from pagan Antiochians. It was also in Antioch where some of the first Christians began witnessing to the Greeks (Acts 11: 20). When the leaders in the Jerusalem church heard of the growth of the church in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to Antioch where he witnessed what the Lord was doing. Needing help, he sought out Saul (who had been converted roughly 3 years earlier) in strengthening the believers in Antioch. For one year Saul (later called Paul) and Barnabas taught together in Antioch before they began their missionary journeys together (Acts 11). Antioch thus became a strategic center for world missions as the first church sending out *voluntary* missionaries—those who were not fleeing persecution! (Acts 13: 1) While Jerusalem was the center of Christianity from 30 to 44 AD, Antioch became the center from 44 to 68 AD. The progressive shift from Jerusalem to Antioch is presented in the first twelve chapters of Acts (Cairns, pp. 55, 59).

### ***C. The Contribution of the Graeco-Roman World to the Spread of Christianity***

Cairns (*Christianity Through the Centuries*, pp. 35-36) has noted several contributions of the Greek and Roman cultures to the spread of the Christian faith. They are noted below.

#### ***1. Political contributions from the Romans***

**a.** The Romans developed a unifying system of law and order as well as the concept of the unity of mankind under this legal system. This idea, in turn, contributed to the Biblical teaching of the universality of mankind under the law of God. Roman citizenship granted to non-Romans contributed to the concept of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven granted to all men who were previously aliens to the covenants which God had made with His Jewish people (cf. Phil. 3: 20; Eph. 2: 12). Those who were born as Roman citizens, even Jews like Saul of Tarsus, were afforded civil and judicial rights going far beyond those who had to purchase their citizenship. On his missionary journeys, Paul made liberal use of his status as a Jew who had been “born” a Roman citizen (Acts 22: 28; 16: 37; 25: 11).

**b.** Free movement throughout the Roman Empire from the time of Augustus Caesar (27 BC to AD 14) made travel from one part of the empire to the other relatively safe. By the time of Christ, no country dared challenge the might of the Roman legions (soldiers). This was known as the Pax Romana (The Roman Peace), during which Rome ruled the world “from Armenia to Spain, from the Sahara Desert of North Africa to the river Rhine of present-day Germany”, an empire of some 50 million people of many nations and ethnic groups. The “barbarians” were those people groups and nations which did not participate in the Graeco-Roman culture (Pillay, p. 5).

**c.** An excellent system of roads, some in existence today, made travel possible from one strategic city to the next. The Apostle Paul made liberal use of these roads on his missionary journeys.

**d.** The Roman army drafted natives into military service, some of whom became Christians. When these soldiers were deployed to different parts of the Roman Empire, they took their faith with them. Cairns believes that the Christian faith was introduced in Britain in this manner.

*e.* The Roman conquest of so many powerful city states led to the belief that the prevailing religions and gods of these conquered peoples were inadequate. Furthermore, the emperor cult worship (the worship of the Roman emperor) did not satisfy the personal religious needs of these people; it was merely a civic religion instituted by the emperor to provide civic and political stability throughout the empire. [Generally the Roman government was tolerant of all religions provided that their adherents would also worship the emperor. It was this emperor worship which laid the foundation for the persecution and execution of so many Christians over a succession of Roman emperors—Christians who could not, and would not say, “Caesar is Lord”.] Thus, the conquered peoples of the empire were left in a spiritual vacuum which prepared them for the introduction of the Christian faith. The greatest rival of the Christian faith at this time were the mystery religions of Cybele from Phrygia, Mithraism from Persia, and Isis from Egypt, and Dionysius which provided some hope of redemption and life after death. “The invasion and growth of eastern mystery religions between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D. helped bridge the gap between the old civic religion of the empire and the new emerging Christian faith. By providing a new religious mentality and consciousness, they helped to prepare the way for the eventual triumph of Christianity” (Pillay, p. 6). The religious pluralism of the Graeco-Roman world provided an umbrella under which the Christian faith could take root and grow (Pillay, p. 8). True Christianity always thrives in a world of religious pluralism. In the arena of ideas, the truth will eventually win out. The only way for false religions to have a chance against Christianity is when the State persecutes Christians or provides others with the liberty to persecute Christians. Persecution under the sanction of the State has been the pattern since the beginning of the Christian church.

## ***2. Intellectual Contributions from the Greeks***

*a.* Greece, under Alexander the Great, provided the language needed for the propagation of the gospel—koine Greek which was a modification of the Attic dialect of Athens. Most educated Romans spoke both Greek and Latin (Cairns, pp. 38-39). Koine (“common”) Greek was not the Greek of the educated class, but the Greek of the common man. Philosophically, this fact has encouraged the translation of the Bible into the common dialect of thousands of people groups who are now able to read the Bible in their spoken tongue. Not only was the NT written in Greek, the OT Hebrew Scriptures was translated into common Greek by a group of 70 scholars and is known as the Septuagint (translated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC). When Jesus and Paul quoted out of the OT, they generally quoted from the Greek translation of the OT and not the Hebrew Scriptures since Greek was more commonly used than Hebrew.

*b.* Greek philosophy delivered a death blow to many of the older polytheistic (many gods) religions which could not stand up to the rationalistic criticism of Greek thought. Yet, Greek philosophy was more adept (skilled) in asking questions than in supplying answers; therefore, those who looked to Greek philosophy to supply their spiritual needs came away empty. This spiritual and religious emptiness became the vacuum which was later filled by the gospel as Paul and others began to preach to the Gentile world. The predominant thought in Paul’s day was either Epicureanism (the goal in life is calm pleasure regulated by morality, self-control, serenity, and cultural development) or Stoicism (one should pursue virtue through reason while remaining indifferent to the external world including its passions and emotions). God was an abstraction to the Greek mind, but not a personal God who could love you or be loved by you. The “good, the beautiful, and the true” were intellectual abstractions or ideals which Plato and Socrates wrote about but which could never be experienced. It was these same abstractions—the good, the

beautiful, and the true—which became incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, a personal God who could love and be loved (Cairns, pp. 39-40).

We can understand from all this that God sent Jesus Christ “at the right time” (Rom. 5: 6) or “when the fullness of the time came” for the most efficient proclamation and spread of the gospel. This may be as close as we can come to answering the question, “Why did God wait so long before He sent Christ to die for sinners?” Keep in mind, as well, that God was not without a witness in the 4000 years from creation to Christ (if we hold to a strict chronology of the Bible). God gave Adam the promise of a redeemer who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3: 15) and this promise was passed down orally from generation to generation until the time of Abraham to whom a fuller revelation of Christ was given.

#### *D. The Contributions of the Jews to the Spread of Christianity*

The Christian faith is true Judaism come into its own. This is to say that Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism and the fulfillment of all the promises made by God to the Jewish people from the time of Abraham to Christ (cf. Gen. 15). Paul himself called the church the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6: 16), indicating his belief that all the promises of God in the OT were fulfilled in the NT church (cf. 2 Cor. 1: 20). There is a fundamental continuity between the true people of God in the Old Covenant and the true people of God in the New Covenant. Faith in God’s promises has always been, and will always be, the criterion of membership in his church, whether the church of the Old Covenant (Acts 7: 38—“ekklesia” or “called out ones”), or the church (Acts 9: 31—“ekklesia”) of the New Covenant. “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of *faith* who are sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3: 7). The OT scriptures come to us from the Jewish faith, scriptures which lay out in detail God’s plan of redemption from Adam until Christ.

Not only do we receive the OT Scriptures and the Redeemer from the Jewish nation, but also the ethical system which Christ assured us that He did not come to abolish, but to fulfill (Matt. 5: 17; Cairns, p. 41). In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ made the necessary clarifications and interpretations of the moral law which only He as the new law-giver (the new Moses) could have made. We are not saved by keeping the law; nevertheless, Jesus saved us for the purpose of living holy lives, the fulfillment of God’s original intention with the Jewish nation who should have lived—but failed to live—as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2: 9; cf. Ex. 19: 6). If we love Him, we will keep His commandments (Jn. 14: 15).

The church, therefore, is the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham to give Him a seed as numerous as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the seashore (Gen. 22: 17). Salvation is from the Jews (Jn. 4: 22), and for this reason, Christ’s priority throughout His earthly ministry was to the Jews and not the Samaritans or the Gentiles (Matt. 10: 5-6). This priority is seen in His parting words to the disciples in Acts 1: 8 and is strictly followed by the Apostle to the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul, who always presented the message of the gospel first in the Jewish synagogues before going strictly to the Gentiles (Acts 13: 14; 14: 1; 17: 1; cf. Cairns, p. 43). The gospel was the good news of redemption to the Jew *first* and then to the Gentile (Rom. 1: 16). The synagogue became the most efficient institution in the Roman Empire for the rapid spread of the gospel and the growth of the church, for when the Gentile proselytes heard that they were equal to the Jews in the Christian faith and did not have to follow Jewish ways, they flocked to Christianity by the millions.

### ***E. The Spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire***

Christianity as a religion was legalized in 313 AD (the 4<sup>th</sup> century) by the Edict of Milan under Emperor Constantine, but even before this time there was much progress in the expansion of the church. By 180 AD, Christians could be found in all the provinces of the Roman Empire including many parts of North Africa. By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the Coptic Church in Egypt was well established, followed by the establishment of the church in Ethiopia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (see Pillay, p. 8, for more details).

## ***II. The Persecution of the Church***

### ***A. Religious Persecution by the Jews***

For a long time the persecution of the Church was limited to Jewish opposition. Providentially, God would *not* allow a wide-spread Roman persecution until the reign of Decius from 249-251, thus allowing His “little flock” (Lk. 12: 32) to become firmly established before encountering the onslaught of the Roman government. Ever since the Decian persecution, Christianity has from time encountered fierce persecution from governments opposed to the Christian faith. There has been more persecution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone—and more Christian martyrs—than in all the other 19 centuries since the resurrection of Christ. This kind of *statist* persecution is the most common kind of persecution in our day, but it always comes in connection with the persecution of *opposing religions* which use the state to persecute the minority religion. For example, in Pakistan, Muslim police officers look the other way when Christians are robbed or attacked and when church buildings are burned. There is very little justice for Christians in predominantly Muslim or Hindu countries. But while the prevailing religion uses the state to crush the church, all such efforts are futile. Satan, by using the state (the government) can pour “rivers of water out of his mouth” (a metaphor) to drown the church with a flood of persecution only to discover that God will cause the earth to open its mouth to drink up these rivers and save His church (Rev. 12: 15-16).

From the death of Christ in 30 AD until the reign of Emperor Nero in 64 AD, there was essentially no opposition from the Roman government, only from Jewish leaders who did not have enough influence with Rome to harness its energy against the church. Jewish opposition to the Apostle Paul was continuous as he challenged the Jews from city to city in their synagogues. He gives an abbreviated record of his sufferings in 2 Cor. 11 not for the purpose of boasting but to demonstrate the foolishness of boasting on the part of his accusers and opponents in Corinth. By the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, he had already been imprisoned, beaten many times, had been whipped by the Jews with 39 lashes on five occasions (40 plus lashes was considered a death sentence), had been beaten with rods three times, stoned once and left for dead (Acts 14: 19). Along with the persecutions, God providentially allowed him to be shipwrecked three times, and on one of those occasions he was exposed to the sea for a night and a day surviving possibly on wreckage from the ship. In addition to all this he had been in danger often on his journeys from robbers, hunger, thirst, and cold weather (2 Cor 11: 23-27). He also had been slandered and ridiculed by those who called themselves Christians (2 Cor. 10: 10). Even with all the persecution he faced, God did not exempt him from the ordinary dangers and frailties of life.

Christians are tempted to think God is supposed to exempt them from the ordinary sorrows of life while they serve His cause, but Paul’s life proves the opposite. Christ himself learned

obedience through the things He suffered (Heb. 5: 8), and it is doubtful that any of us will learn obedience otherwise. Toward the end of his suffering during his second imprisonment in Rome—a suffering of which God had informed Ananias (Acts 9: 16)—Paul writes to Timothy for the last time, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come” (2 Tim. 4: 6). (Tradition has it that Paul was beheaded by Nero in his second imprisonment.) And what a departure it must have been when Paul entered into the presence of God and of the angels in heaven! What sort of reception do you suppose he received?

No wonder Paul didn’t know which he would rather happen, either to keep living in order to serve the churches, or to go ahead and die and be at rest with the Lord (Phil. 1: 23-24)! His life was certainly no picnic. But Paul received these persecutions with joy, knowing also that he had brought much grief and punishment upon Christians himself. He called himself the “least of the apostles”, not worthy of being called an apostle because he had persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15: 9).

Before Paul, James the brother of John, had been put to death by Herod, and Stephen had been stoned by the Jews. Others had been persecuted in connection with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8: 1). Other than opposition from the Jews, Christians were generally able to worship in peace and safety throughout the period in which Paul was planting churches, and even toward the end of his life (while in his first imprisonment in Rome) he instructs Timothy in Ephesus to pray for “for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2: 2). This statement assumes that a tranquil and quiet life during this time was possible.

### ***B. Persecution by Roman Emperors***

No *general* persecutions of the Jews took place for 200 years until Decius (249-251), but *local* persecutions were a constant threat under Nero (54-68), Domitian (81-96), Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-138), Marcus Aurelius, who was the philosopher-emperor (161-180), and Septimus Severus (193-211) (Pillay, p. 9). In 64 AD, the city of Rome caught fire with 10 of the 14 sections of the city destroyed. Rumor spread that Nero had started the fire himself to rebuild the city according to his desires, but there is no firm evidence proving this theory. Two of the four sections which had not been destroyed contained a large population of Jews and Christians, providing Nero with a good scapegoat (someone to falsely accuse). He blamed the fire on the Christian population some of whom he rounded up for execution. Some of them were covered in the skins of animals and exposed to wild dogs which quickly tore them to pieces. Others were crucified, and still others were burned alive as human torches to light up Nero’s botanical gardens at night while he amused himself by riding around in his chariot in the midst of his invited guests. Even the Roman guests were compelled to pity the Christians for his cruelty. Tacitus, a Roman historian, was convinced that the fire had occurred accidentally but that Nero had simply used the Christians to allay (put to rest) the rumor that he had started the fires on purpose (Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, pp. 33-35).

During Trajan’s reign as emperor, Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia, sent a letter to Trajan informing him of how he had dealt with the Christians in his province and wishing to receive confirmation for his methods. His letter presents a small sample of the persecution going on at this time as well as the bravery of true believers.

This is the course I have adopted. I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment. If they persist I sentence them to death, for their inflexible obstinacy [stubbornness] should certainly be punished. Christians who are Roman citizens I reserved to be sent to Rome. I discharged those who were willing to curse Christ, a thing, which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be persuaded to do (Quoted in S. M. Houghton, *Sketches from Church History*, p. 11, words in brackets mine).

Two things should be noted from this quotation. First, Christians who would not deny their faith were considered “obstinate” or stubborn. For the cultured Roman, polytheism was no big deal, and the Christians were stupid to die for their faith in Jesus when they could just as easily keep their religion as long as they were willing to worship the emperor. From this we understand the mentality of the Roman population. To use a popular American expression, “They just didn’t get it.” They could not understand such commitment.

Secondly, Christians who were Roman citizens had the right of appeal to Caesar; therefore, Pliny sent them to appear before Trajan. We recall the same procedure for Paul when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25: 11-12).

Thirdly, it was already an established rule that true Christians could not be persuaded to deny Christ as their only Lord; thus, those who did deny Christ were acquitted on the assumption that they were not true Christians. As the Apostle Peter proved from his denial of Christ, this rule should not have been set in stone, and probably many true believers later repented of their denial. Later, we will study the Donatist controversy in which this rule is both defended and challenged by Christian scholars, but suffice it to say at this point that the definition of a true believer by 112 AD was one who could not be persuaded to deny Christ under any circumstances.

Another part of this letter opens up a window to the witness which Christians presented to the Romans in the way they lived.

On an appointed day the Christians are accustomed to meet at daybreak and to recite (or sing) a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by a *sacramentum* (oath) to abstain from theft and robbery, adultery, and breach of faith (Houghton, p. 11, emphasis and parentheses his).

When persecution arose under Decius in 249 (137 years later) all Christians in the empire were ordered to sacrifice to the ancient gods and to burn incense before the statue of Decius. Thus, Decius’ persecution was not as haphazard and local as previous persecutions had been, but systematic and widespread. Those who complied with this demand received a certificate proving that they had done so. Many Christians refused and were martyred (put to death for the sake of Christ) for their faith. Others obtained false certificates, and still others yielded to the threat of torture by worshipping the state gods. For Decius, whose empire was being increasingly threatened by the barbarian invasions from the north, the only way to save the empire was for all Romans to worship the ancient gods who had been angered by the religious negligence of the Roman population. Since he was interested primarily in making Christians look like apostates and not martyrs, relatively few Christians actually died during this time, but thousands were imprisoned and tortured for their faith, including Origen (Gonzalez, pp. 85-87).

Up until this time, virtually all Christians who had stood firm in their faith before the Roman officials had been put to death and became known as “martyrs” or “witnesses”. But in the Decian persecution, those who survived the torture without renouncing their faith or worshipping

the statue of the gods became known as “confessors”, a title of honor and respect given to them by the rest of the church. The confessors became very important later when the church was attempting to solve the issue of those who had lapsed—the Christians who had sacrificed to the Roman gods. In the controversy between Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and Novatian, the question arose as to who should be able to decide the terms of readmission to the church and what those terms would be. There were some who believed the “confessors”, those who had been tortured and had not submitted to the authorities, should be given the honor of deciding these matters. Others, like Cyprian, believed that the church authorities should decide these matters. The controversy continued for several generations and arose again in a different way in the Montanist controversy. The question of what to do about Christians who sinned after baptism was an ongoing problem in the Western church resulting eventually in the doctrine of “penance”, a doctrine which the reformers later protested (Gonzalez, pp. 87-88).

Emperor Valerian continued executing Christians from 253-260 including Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, among other notable believers. The last and worst persecution under Roman emperors began in 303 under Diocletian (285-305) under whose reign emperor worship reached its peak. Diocletian, after taking the throne in 285, had divided the Roman Empire into four provinces with each province having an emperor. During this time persecution included the confiscation of Christians’ property, the torture and execution of those who refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods or the emperor, destruction of church buildings, and the burning of the Holy Scriptures. In the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire under Galerius, the persecution lasted eight long years from 303-311. During this extremely difficult period of time, the Christian martyr emerged as the ultimate example of commitment to Christ (Pillay, pp. 9-10).

In 311 Galerius became deathly ill and issued a decree granting Christians permission to assemble freely throughout the empire. He even asked Christians to pray for his recovery and for the Roman Empire. He died the same year of “unspeakable torments” (B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History*, p. 13). This was the last general persecution of the church by the Roman Empire except for a short period of lesser opposition (not persecution) from Julian the Apostate after Constantine (see below).

The real issue with the Roman Emperors was loyalty to the State. The people could worship anyone or anything they pleased as long as they demonstrated their loyalty to the Roman Empire by worshipping the Roman gods and Caesar (see above for the certificate which proved such worship). Failure to worship Caesar was a sign of disloyalty to the State (Cairns, p. 89), a gross misunderstanding since Christians were model citizens committed to living holy lives requiring far more moral restraint than legal obedience to Roman law. Further misunderstandings arose because Christians worshipped secretly at night either in homes or in the catacombs (a long series of underground tunnels which served as grave sites) giving the Romans suspicion of subversive activities against the government. It should not require a university degree in sociology to figure out why the Christians worshipped in secret. Assemblies in open public would have been rounded up by the Roman authorities who would have then required them to worship Caesar. Therefore, the Roman government, through repressive measures, forced Christians to go “underground” with their worship and then falsely accused them of subversive activities to overthrow the government. It was one of those “catch 22” scenarios in which the Christians could not avoid difficulty no matter what they did.



### ***C. Persecution by the Roman Population***

There were also other false accusations against Christians including incest and cannibalism (eating human flesh). The charge of cannibalism arose from the practice of the Lord's Supper in which Christians professed to "eat" the body of the Lord Jesus and "drink" His blood (Jn. 6). The Christians understood this partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ *symbolically*, not *literally*, but the rite itself provided the Romans with ample excuse to accuse them of ritual cannibalism as well as infanticide—the killing of infant children as the *source* of this flesh and blood. Greeting one another with a "holy kiss" (Rom. 16: 16; 1 Cor. 16: 20; 2 Cor. 13: 12; 1 Thes. 5: 26) gave the Romans cause for the charge of incest (Cairns, p. 89) especially when combined with the practice of calling one another "brother" and "sister".

But these false accusations came as no surprise to Christians who were familiar with Jesus' beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and *say all kinds of evil against you falsely*, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5: 11-12). Wicked king Ahab called Elijah the "troubler of Israel" because of his harsh words for Ahab's administration, but Elijah knew the truth, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house *have*, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals" (1 Kings 18: 17-18). Christians were later blamed for the downfall of the Roman Empire to the barbarian hordes from the north because of their "atheism" (refusal to worship the Roman gods of the State), but the real truth is that Rome fell from within because of its immorality and injustice. God used the Pax Romana (the Peace of Rome) as a "conduit" (a passageway) for the spread of the gospel, and when that purpose was accomplished, He easily moved it out of the way for other kings and kingdoms to follow. As for God, He had already installed His King on Mt. Zion, even Jesus Christ, and whoever did not do homage to the Son would incur His wrath (Ps. 2; Dan. 2).

The hatred of some Roman citizens for Christians stemmed (originated) partly from Christianity's appeal to the lower classes and slaves (Cairns, pp. 89-90). The affluent lifestyle of many Romans depended on the continuation of slavery and the distinct separation of the classes. The lower class provided wealthy Romans with the servitude necessary to make their lives comfortable and their economy viable. Christians, on the other hand, regarded all men as equal before God and all Christians as fellow heirs to the kingdom of God (Col. 3: 11; Gal. 3: 28). Such radical teaching was a threat to the treasured social institutions which kept a small segment of Roman society in their powerful and privileged position. Any belief in the equality of all men might encourage the masses of people to revolt against the Roman elite.

From Paul's epistles, we must conclude that masters and slaves existed side by side with one another in the same church and that faith in Christ required special obedience from the slaves and special treatment from the masters (Eph. 6: 5-9; Col. 3: 22-4: 1; Philemon 10-15). One may legitimately wonder why there is not a pointed condemnation of slavery found anywhere in the NT. Even the Mosaic Law does not condemn the institution of slavery but closely regulates the practice. The answer to this question is too involved to answer here. Suffice it to say that while the gospel does not eradicate social distinctions between people on a functional level in society—there are, after all, *employers* and *employees*, leaders and those who are led—it does establish the *essential* equality (the equality of essence) of all people, rich or poor, slave or free, in the church before God. In the above passages, masters are strictly warned to treat their slaves

with dignity knowing that they stand under a common master, Jesus Christ, who shows *no partiality* to masters above their slaves. If anything, the masters bear more responsibility to set a good example of the faith to their slaves who look to them for leadership. It is also conceivable that within the church, slaves who grew in their faith more than their Christian masters would have been chosen to places of leadership within the church so that a master could conceivably have his own slave as his elder! Though I cannot produce any historical examples of this scenario, theologically it is possible that such situations existed. Furthermore, slaves were not given a free hand to do as they please. Their faith in Christ should have constrained them to work more diligently for their masters in order to win their masters to Christ. If their masters were already believers, this was all the more reason to work diligently for their benefit.

One can see that the teaching of Christianity was radically offensive to pagans who cherished their social and political status, and that most of those who enjoyed such status were reluctant (hesitant) to belong to a community (the church) in which they were not given privileged treatment. On the other hand, the Christian faith was very attractive, indeed, for the lower classes and slaves who were for the first time in their lives treated with dignity as human beings by wealthy Christians. For this reason, Paul informed the Corinthian Christians, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong” (1 Cor. 1: 26-27).

[The implications of this mixture of social groups within the early church are enormous for church growth today. Some missiologists have argued that churches grow faster if they are *homogeneous* or made up of the same social strata of society—working class, professional class, educated, uneducated, black, white, Asian, Hispanic, and so on. People are more likely inclined to be part of a church in which they can mingle with “their kind of people”. The claims of these church growth experts have been proven to be true all over the world. Churches do grow more quickly when they consist of the same type of people living at the same socio-economic level. But this “success” begs another more important question. What *kind* of growth are we experiencing in these homogeneous churches? Are we growing *healthy organisms* in which the diverse (made up of different parts) body of Christ is functioning for the good of every member, including the weaker members of the body (1 Cor. 12), or are we growing *cancers* in which the members of the body (acting like cancer cells) grow into undifferentiated tumors which multiply unceasingly but provide no functional benefit for anyone but themselves. This is, admittedly, a question to be explored in ecclesiology and missiology and not church history, but the rapid growth of the early church in very difficult circumstances should prevent us from swallowing uncritically the current theories of church growth “hook, line, and sinker”. It is obvious that the early church offered something of value to people besides elaborate architecture, professional choirs, or extravagant youth ministries. The church had none of this. What it did have was a message of hope and the practice of love for all people regardless of social standing. This was a “dangerous grace” for elitist Romans.]

### *III. The Apologists*

Before the liberty enjoyed under Constantine after 313, very learned Christians responded to false accusations by writing a defense of the Christian faith called an “apology”. The name does not imply that these Christians were “apologizing” for being Christians or that they were apologizing for the behavior of their fellow Christians. Rather, an apology was an argument or a

formal defense of the Christian position and a refutation of the accusations against it. The general policy of the Roman Empire for many years was the one outlined by Emperor Trajan in his communication with Pliny the Younger. Christians were *not* to be sought and hounded out of their hiding places as Saul the Pharisee had done to Christians before his conversion. Rather, they were to be left alone *unless* they were positively accused by someone else. If accused, they then had to be brought before the Roman authorities who would interrogate them. If they admitted to being Christians, they were first presented two choices. They could curse Christ and be freed, or they would be executed. Those who were Roman citizens were brought to Rome for a similar trial. Later, under Decius, this strategy was changed. Decius' goal was to promote the worship of the Roman gods and thereby avoid the escalating threat of the barbarian hordes. He was convinced that the Roman gods which had made Rome so prosperous had been offended by neglect. Thus, instead of killing Christians he had them tortured to abandon their faith. Those who endured the torture and refused to abandon Christianity came to be known as “confessors” who were highly honored among other believers (Gonzalez, pp. 87-88).

Thus, it was in the best interest of Christians to provide a rational defense of their faith and a refutation of all the false charges brought against them—political subversion, incest, atheism, cannibalism, and infanticide. If they could clear away these false misunderstandings of their faith, perhaps they could gain the good will of their neighbors who would allow them to worship in peace instead of accusing them before the authorities (Gonzalez, p. 48). Therefore, just as persecution by the Jews had been used by God for the purpose of spreading the gospel, the false accusations against Christians was used by God to stimulate intelligent Christians to write rational defenses of the faith. Even if these apologies were unsuccessful in converting unbelievers, they still served to strengthen Christians in their own faith (Kuiper, p. 16).

The foremost of the apologists was *Justin Martyr* who lived from 100-165 (thus named because he was later beheaded as a martyr), who wrote *First Apology*, *Second Apology*, and *Dialogue with Trypho* (Cairns, p. 106). *Origen* (180-250) was another apologist who defended the faith against the writings of Celsus who ridiculed Christianity as being a religion of ignorant, superstitious people. Origen wrote the apology, *Against Celsus*, in the third century. The Apologists were not all in agreement on the Christian's proper relationship to pagan culture. Some apologists, like *Tertullian* (160-220) argued, “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What does the Academy have to do with the Church?” In other words, the Christian faith and pagan Graeco-Roman culture have nothing whatever to do with one another, and Christianity cannot adopt anything of pagan culture for its own use. He was also the apologist who argued that it was useless for the Romans to kill Christians since “blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”; that is, the more Christians you kill the faster the church grows. *Tatian*, the pupil of Justin Martyr, agreed with Tertullian's disdain for Roman arrogance by arguing that everything valuable in Graeco-Roman culture had been borrowed from the “barbarians” who were not part of this culture. Astronomy had been learned from the Babylonians, geometry had been learned from the Egyptians, the alphabet from the Phoenicians. The writings of Moses predated Plato, Aristotle, and Homer. Even the statues worshiped by many Romans were sculptures of prostitutes who had posed for the sculptors; thus, the Romans were actually worshiping the lowest members of society (Gonzalez, pp. 52-53). *Athenagoras* wrote *Supplication for Christians* refuting the charges of atheism and *Theophilus* of Antioch wrote *Apology to Autolytus*, a very educated pagan magistrate whom he hoped to win to the Christian faith.

**Justin Martyr** was not so critical of Roman culture and argued that there was much about pagan thinking, especially in Greek philosophy, which reflected Christian thinking. Greek philosophy acknowledged a supreme being which created every other being. The Apostle Paul hinted at this belief in his address on Mars Hill in Athens when he said, “for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring’” (Acts 17: 28). Plato and Socrates acknowledged the existence of life after death, and Plato wrote about another world of eternal realities lying behind the visible world. Justin proposed that the bridge between this philosophy and Christianity was the Logos—meaning both “word” and “reason”. The real world can be understood because the human mind “shares in the Logos or universal reason that upholds all reality”. Jesus Christ is the “Word”, the “Logos”, made flesh which “enlightens every man (Jn. 1: 9), and even before the incarnation of Christ He was the source of all knowledge even for pagan philosophers like Plato, who in some sense were “Christians”. Every good thing that could be found in pagan philosophy could be traced to the Christian faith (Gonzalez, pp. 54-56). While Justin’s motives were good in his attempt to reconcile Christian and non-Christian thinking, his marriage of the Christian faith and Greek philosophy proved to bring much confusion in the church later on.

The doctrine of “common grace” teaches us that there is much good produced by those who are not believers. Just as much of the science and technology of the modern world has been developed by unbelievers, much art, music, logic and philosophy has been produced by the unbelieving Graeco-Roman culture. Some of the philosophy is valid, and this is to be expected since man, even sinful man, is made in the image of God and reflects his Creator in some of his creative activity. The science of logic can be detected in the epistles of Paul and in Jesus’ reasoning with the Pharisees, and yet the science of logic is as old as man. All truth is God’s truth; that is, if there is anything true in the area of science, technology, and philosophy, it is because God has revealed it to men. The problem arises when Christians attempt to accommodate the Christian faith to human reasoning in ways which compromise the faith. This is what happens when we attempt to label people like Plato as “Christians”.

#### ***IV. The Apostolic Fathers***

The ***apostolic fathers*** were men, other than the apostles, who knew the apostles, were personally taught by the apostles, and continued the task of writing Christian literature for the edification (up-building) of the church. Most of their writing was done between 95 and 150 AD (Cairns, p. 73) and were concerned primarily with the “enemy from ***without***”, the Roman Empire, rather than the “enemy from within”, the heresies arising in the church at a later date (Houghton, p. 23). The ***church fathers***, on the other hand, lived after the church was delivered from the persecution of the Roman Empire from the time of Constantine the Great and dealt primarily with the internal enemy of false doctrines and heresy, the enemy ***within*** the church.

##### ***A. Clement of Rome (30-100)***

Learning of a revolt against the elders in the Corinthian church, Clement wrote a letter to the church urging Christians to be in subjection to their elders. The high position of elders or bishops and the esteem with which they should be treated comes into view in this letter. There is a function separation of the “clergy” from the “laity” (Cairns, p. 73).

***B. Ignatius (first to the early part of the second century)***

Ignatius was bishop of the church in Syrian Antioch for 40 years before his martyrdom at the hands of Emperor Trajan. He wrote seven letters to churches. When Trajan visited Antioch, he summoned Ignatius, heard his confession of faith in Christ, and immediately condemned him to be thrown to the wild beast in the Colosseum in Rome. During his journey to Rome, he was allowed to visit several churches along the way to which he wrote letters of thanksgiving for their kindness before his martyrdom. There is evidence from his letters that one elder in each of the churches had emerged as the “monarchical bishop”, the chief elder to whom other elders were subject, thus laying the groundwork for the distinction between bishop and elder in the church (Cairns, p. 74). His opinion in this matter, while weighty, should not be considered sufficiently substantial to overturn the insurmountable evidence of the NT that the bishop (*episcopos*) and the elder (*presbuteros*) were interchangeable terms referring to the same office. The Apostles Peter and John both refer to themselves as elders (1 Pet. 5: 1; 2 Jn. 1: 1; 3 Jn. 1: 1), and Paul uses both terms in addressing the same group of people in Miletus (cf. Acts 20: 17, 28). Issues of ecclesiology should be determined from Scripture and not church history. He was also the first to use the term *catholic*, although he did not ascribe superiority to the bishop of Rome (Cairns, p. 74).

On the day of his death, standing before 45,000 bloodthirsty Roman spectators who considered the execution of Christians as entertainment, Ignatius testified, “I am God’s grain, to be ground between the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become a holy loaf for the Lord” (Houghton, p. 16).

***3. Polycarp (70-155)***

Possibly the best known of all the apostolic fathers was Polycarp who was burned at the stake in 155. Threatened with such a cruel death unless he cursed Christ, he said, “Eighty and six years have I served Christ and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me? You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and then is quenched; but you know not of the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment. Bring what you will” (Houghton, p. 18).

His focus was not the governmental structure of the church (polity) but practical daily living, a focus which is revealed in his letter to the Philippians (110) in which he quotes liberally from the old and new testaments (Cairns, p. 75).

***4. Other Writings of the Apostolic Fathers (Cairns, pp. 75-77)***

***a. The Epistle of Barnabas (130)***—a letter intended to prove that the Christian was not under the Mosaic covenant. There is much allegorization in this letter in which the OT Scriptures are interpreted symbolically to mean whatever he fancied them to mean. Origen, one of the church fathers, later promoted this method of interpretation much to the detriment (harm) of sound Biblical interpretation.

***b. The Epistle to Diognetus (late second or early third century)***—a rational defense of Christianity against idolatry and Judaism written to the tutor to Marcus Aurelius, one of the persecuting emperors of Christianity.

**c. *The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians (150)***—a sermon upholding the resurrection of the body and the practical out-working of the Christian life.

**d. *The Interpretations of the Sayings of the Lord***—written by Papias (60-130), the bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia, to preserve the writings of other Christians who had known the apostles.

**e. *The Shepherd of Hermas (150)***—a book modeled after the Book of Revelation calling sinners to repentance.

**f. *The Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)***—composed in the middle of the second century, a book which deals with the practical Christian life, baptism, communion, fasting, the distinguishing of true from false prophets, and disciplinary matters. It presents a well-rounded view of life in the early church.

### **5. Summary Statement of the Writings of the Apostolic Fathers**

If we examine the Pauline epistles, we will discover that he addressed concrete problems and specific issues within the churches and made no attempt to set forth the entire body of Christian doctrine. The same is true of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers who addressed specific issues and problems within the churches and made no attempt to formulate the entire teaching of the Christian church. The Apologists, likewise, did not formulate Christian doctrine but defended the church against false accusations and continued persecution. The fact that none of the writings of the apostolic fathers were included in the complete canon of scripture endorsed by the whole church indicates that there was nothing essentially unique or new about their writings which was not already contained in the NT gospels or epistles. Berkhof's assessment of the Apostolic Fathers is as follows:

It is frequently remarked that in passing from the study of the New Testament to that of the Apostolic Fathers one is conscious of a tremendous change. There is not the same freshness and originality, depth and clearness. And this is no wonder, for it means a transition from truth given by infallible inspiration to truth reproduced by fallible pioneers. Their productions were bound to lean rather heavily on Scripture and to be of a primitive type, concerning itself with the first principles of faith rather than with the deeper truths of religion.

Their teachings are characterized by a certain meagerness. They are generally in full agreement with the teachings of Scripture, are often couched in the very words of the Bible, but add very little by way of explication and are not at all systematized. And all this need not surprise anyone, for there had as yet been but a short time for reflection on the truths of Scripture and for assimilation of the great mass of material contained in the Bible....In spite of their comparative poverty, however, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers are of considerable importance, since they witness to the canonicity and integrity of the New Testament Books and form a doctrinal link between the New Testament and the more speculative writings of the Apologetes which appeared during the second century....

It is a matter of common observation that the writings of the Apostolic Fathers contain very little that is doctrinally important. Their teachings are generally in harmony with the truth revealed in the word of God, and are often represented in the very words of Scripture, but for that very reason cannot be said to increase or deepen our insight into the truth or to shed light on the inter-relations of the doctrinal teachings of Scripture....

The moralistic strain is, perhaps, the weakest point in the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers. It was related to the moralism present in the heathen world of that day and characteristic of the natural man as such, and was bound to serve the interests of legalism. The sacraments are represented as the means by which the blessings of salvation are communicated to man. Baptism begets the new life and secures the forgiveness of all sins or of past sins only (Hermas and II Clement); and the Lords' Supper is the means of communication to man a blessed immortality or eternal life....

Man is said to be justified by faith, but the relation of faith to justification and the new life is not clearly understood. An anti-Pauline strain of legalism becomes manifest at this point. Faith is simply the first step in the way of life, on which the moral development of the individual depends. But after the forgiveness of sins is once granted in baptism and apprehended by faith, man next merits this blessing by his good works, which

become a second and independent principle alongside of faith. Christianity is often represented as a *nova lex* [new law], and love, leading on to a new obedience, takes the leading place. Not the grace of God, but the good works of man sometimes appear in the foreground (*The History of Christian Doctrines*, pp. 38-41).

When the threats of Marcionism and Gnosticism hit their peak with their own systems of doctrine, it was time for the church to rise to the occasion by formalizing the entire teaching of the church. Those whom God chose to do this included such men as *Irenaus*, *Clement of Alexandria*, *Tertullian*, and *Origen*.

## ***V. Heresies within the Early Church***

### ***A. Judaistic Heresies***

For long time the church did not completely understand the fundamentally new thing God had done by including the Gentiles in the church. Many of the Jewish Christians were still of the opinion that Gentile Christians should behave like Jews. The entire epistle to the Galatians is devoted to the question of the relationship of the Christian to the Law of Moses. Paul argues in that epistle that as a covenant administration, the Mosaic Law is no longer in effect for the Christian, rendering circumcision and obedience to various other Mosaic regulations null and void for Christians, whether Jew or Gentile. On the other hand the moral regulations found in the Mosaic Law are still in effect for guidance in the Christian life. Furthermore, if we walk by the Spirit and rely on His power, we will keep the moral law of God (Gal. 5). The first council of the church recorded in Acts 15 (49 AD) definitively established the *discontinuity* of the Mosaic Law as the covenant administration under which the Christian lives. While the moral law—presented *both* in the OT and the NT—continues as the standard of behavior for the believer, he is now under the New Covenant with better promises, the argument of the entire book of *Hebrews*.

### ***B. Greek Heresies***

By far the greater threat to the church was Greek philosophy, something we have touched on earlier in our discussion of Justin Martyr who zealously attempted to make Christianity appealing to the Graeco-Roman population. Many more Gentiles from a pagan background were coming into the church than Jews, which meant that the Greek philosophical influence upon the church was very significant. Justin lived from about 100-160, and it was in about 150 when the threat of *gnosticism* reached its peak (Cairns, p. 98).

#### ***1. Gnosticism***

Gnosticism originated as an explanation for the origin and existence of evil. Christian Gnostics embraced this philosophical system as a means of explaining how a good God could create a world in which evil exists and thrives. Their answer to this problem was that the world was not created by a *good* God after all, but by the *demiurge*, a lesser god emanating (coming from another source) from the spiritual God. From the highest spiritual God, a series of other lesser spiritual beings had emanated, including the demiurge which came to be associated with Jehovah of the OT. These lesser spiritual emanations came progressively in time and possessed less and less of spirit and more and more matter. The demiurge, who had sufficient spirit to give him creative power, had created the world of matter, a world from which one must be freed by becoming a pure spirit like the highest, supreme God. The “real” world was the spiritual world, not the material world from which man must be freed. According to some Gnostic teaching, everyone does not possess a spirit, but only some who possess a “spark” of the spirit. This spark

is imprisoned in the body and must come into contact with the teaching of Gnosticism to be liberated from the evil body of matter (Gonzalez, p. 61).

The heresy of *Docetism* arose from this Gnostic desire to separate the materialistic god of the OT, the demiurge, from the pure spirit of the NT who existed as Christ. To the Gnostic Docetists, the body of Christ was not a real human body, but only the appearance of a body (from the Greek word *dokeo*, “appear”). Another explanation of the human appearance of Christ was that Christ came upon the body of the man, Jesus, for a short time between his baptism and the beginning of his suffering on the cross; thus, Christ carried out his ministry on earth as a “phantom” or ghost who appeared human but was really pure spirit, and certainly Christ did not truly suffer on the cross. For the Gnostic “Christian”, salvation consisted of being totally freed from the human body. This was accomplished by learning the “gnosis”, the secret knowledge taught only to an elite number of Christians by the heavenly messenger. This spiritual messenger was different for different sects of Gnosticism, but for the “Christian” Gnostic, the messenger was Christ (Cairns, pp. 98-99; Gonzalez, p. 59). This is precisely why Christ could not have come in a material human body, according to the Gnostics. If he had not himself been freed from this body, how could he free anyone else?

Since the body had no part in salvation, Gnostics practiced extreme forms of asceticism or denial of the material needs of the body. The other extreme was the complete abandonment of the body to various forms of bodily excess, like sexual immorality, since what was done in the body was not important (Cairns, p. 99; Gonzalez, p. 62). From these basic tenets (teachings) of Gnosticism, we can better understand the context of some of Paul’s statements in the NT. For example, in Col. 2: 20-23 he says, “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the *commandments and teachings of men*? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and *self-abasement and severe treatment of the body*, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.” In this statement we have evidence of the incipient (at the first stage of existence) Gnosticism creeping into the church even in 62 AD when *Colossians* was written. It took almost 100 years more for Gnosticism to reach its peak.

Also in *1 Corinthians* another manifestation of Gnosticism, mentioned above, presented itself in the sexual immorality of Greek Christians who believed that the activities of the body were unimportant and did not effect the soul. “Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them. Yet the *body* is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the *body*. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your *bodies* are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one *body with her*? For He says, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the *body*, but the immoral man sins against his own *body*. Or do you not know that your *body* is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your *body*” (1Cor. 6: 13-20). Notice that the “body” is mentioned eight times in this passage, emphasizing the importance which the Apostle Paul



placed upon the material body in contradiction to Greek *dualism* in general—and Gnosticism in particular—which maintained the ultimate liberty of the soul from the body.

Christianity emphasizes the importance of *both* the soul and the body since both are joined to Christ and are in union with Him in His death and resurrection. Christ even now exists both spiritually and materially in heaven, and full salvation will not consist merely in a spiritual salvation of the soul, but a salvation of the body, for God created us both body and soul. In heaven, we will not be floating around on immaterial clouds playing immaterial harps; we will exist (after the resurrection—1 Thes 4) in material bodies on a material earth, the new heaven and earth promised to us in Revelation 21: 1.

Aside from the practical errors of Gnosticism found either in asceticism (the denial of the body) or libertinism (the indulgence of the body), Gnosticism was polytheistic, arguing that the god of the OT was not the spiritual God of the NT. It also went from bad to worse by blaspheming Jehovah (Yahweh) of the OT as the evil demiurge who created an evil world. One can see that we can get into serious heresies by trying to explain things which the word of God, the Bible, has left unexplained—namely, the devil and the origin of evil. The God of the OT and the God of the NT are one God, and this God is fully revealed and explained in the Person of Christ, fully God and fully human (Jn. 1: 1-18). Apart from this God-Man there is no salvation. For this reason, the Apostle John was insistent in two of his epistles that Christians confess that Jesus Christ came in true human flesh, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the *flesh* is from God” (1 Jn. 4: 2) “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the *flesh*. This is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 Jn. 1: 7).

As always, God brings good out of adversity. Because of Gnosticism, the church was forced to examine the relationship of the OT to the NT more carefully, coming to the full conviction that there was no difference in the God of the OT with the God of the NT. The dualism between matter and spirit, soul and body, was also overcome; and the true humanity of Christ was defended against any Docetic tendencies. Thus, the theology of the church was emerging from the struggles against errors (Berkhof, pp. 49-50).

## 2. *Manicheanism*

Another expression of the dualism between the body and the soul was Manicheanism, the sect which captured Augustine’s imagination for 12 years before his conversion to Christianity. This was a mix of Christian thought, Persian Zoroastrianism, and other oriental religion into a dualistic philosophy. Once again, the body is considered evil and the soul is good; salvation consists in the liberation of the soul from the body through exposure to the light of Christ. Manicheanism regarded all sexual desire as evil and the unmarried state as a superior state for all Christians. This unbiblical idea apparently crept into the thinking of the established church and laid the foundation for the practice of celibacy among priests. Furthermore, the existence of a special priestly caste which helped others come to the “light” may have contributed to the later idea of the distinction between the clergy and the laity in the Medieval church (Cairns, p. 100). Well did Solomon say, “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc. 1: 9).

### **3. Neoplatonism**

In Neoplatonism the goal of life was reabsorption into the Absolute Being from which everything, including man, had been created through the process of overflow. The study of philosophy is essential to this reabsorption as one seeks to know God through rational thought and contemplation. Before his conversion, Augustine had also experimented with Neoplatonism, as with Manicheanism.

### **C. Theological Heresies**

Some errors in the early church were soul-damning heresies while others are more accurately classified as schisms.

#### **1. Marcionism**

Because of its resemblance to Gnosticism, Marcionism could be classified along with the philosophical heresies of the church, but is more accurately classified as a theological heresy. Marcion, like the Gnostics, disliked both the material world and the world of Judaism. Since the world was evil, then its creator must be evil, as well. Thus far, then, his teaching was like that of the Gnostics. Unlike the Gnostics, he did not believe that a long series of evil beings emanated from the one true spiritual God, but that the God of the OT, Jehovah, was not the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The Jehovah of the OT is *a god*, but not the “Supreme Father” of Jesus Christ—a polytheistic strand in Marcionism. Jehovah arbitrarily (according to whim but not reason) selected the Israelites to be his chosen nation while leaving others in their ignorance. He is also vindictive and unloving by punishing people for their disobedience. The Supreme God taught in the NT does not punish people and is a loving God who showed His compassion to His creatures by sending Christ to redeem us. There will also be no judgment at the end of time since this God is all-loving. For Marcion Christ was not born of the virgin Mary, but simply appeared as a grown man later on.

Not surprisingly, Marcion did not accept the OT scriptures as the abiding word of God, and he established his own canon (standard) of scripture in opposition to the established church. The scriptures included the epistles of Paul and the Gospel of Luke. All other Scriptures were set aside. To answer his critics’ questions about Paul’s continuous reference to the OT, Marcion simply said that they were the additions of Judaizers who spoiled Paul’s original letters (Gonzalez, p. 62). Marcion was a wealthy patron of the church who gathered a large following. When his teaching was officially condemned, he simply organized his own church with its own bishops and its own canon of Scripture, a Marcionite church which lasted for centuries (Gonzalez, p. 62).

Unknowingly, Marcion actually helped the established, catholic (little “c”) church—the “universal” church or church “according to the whole” (Gonzalez, p. 66). By organizing the Scriptures into a canon, he forced the catholic church to establish its own canon of Scripture and to formulate its doctrine against Gnostic and Marcionite heresies—the Apostles Creed formulated around 150. But these measures against heresies also had the effect of increasing the authority of bishops who were considered safe-guards for the authority of Scripture, the unity of the church, and purity of doctrine. Later, this emphasis on the authority of bishops gave rise to the authority of the bishop of Rome (Cairns, p. 100). Thus, the response of the church was a mixed blessing, two-thirds positive and one-third negative.

With all the furor (commotion) about the inconsistencies between the gospels in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—known as the “Synoptic Problem”—it is ironic that precisely these differences between them encouraged the church to recognize all of them as the inspired text. The Gnostics insisted that they alone were in possession of the secret message of Jesus who had passed on this knowledge (gnosis) to a particular disciple who in turn passed it on to others. Each Gnostic group claimed their own book as the only trustworthy teaching coming down from Jesus, the *Gospel of Thomas* being one such book. Marcion, on the other hand had declared the *Gospel of Luke* to be the inspired gospel excluding all the references to the OT which he did not recognize. The church, on the other hand, developed its canon on the consensus of the entire tradition of the apostles found in all four of the gospels—first *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* followed by the *Gospel of John* which received recognition later. The church also very early recognized the authority of *Acts*, the epistles of Paul, and the OT Hebrew Scriptures. The authority of the latter was never seriously questioned by anyone but Marcion and the Gnostics. Thus, by the end of the second century, the core of the NT canon was already established which included the four *Gospels*, *Acts*, and the Pauline epistles. The other smaller books of the NT and *Revelation* received consensus much later. The catholic church, in contradiction to the secret tradition of the Gnostics, offered an apostolic tradition which was universal and open to all Christians (Gonzalez, pp. 62-63).

The Apostles’ Creed was another response to Gnosticism and Marcionism. At first it was called the “symbol of the faith” for it was a means of recognizing a person as an orthodox Christian or a Gnostic or Marcionite heretic. The latter two could not affirm the statements in the Apostle’s Creed built around the Trinitarian formula used in baptism—“the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost”. The phrase, “I believe in God the Father almighty, *maker of heaven and earth*” affirms a belief in God as the creator of the material world which the Gnostics believed was created and governed by an evil demiurge. “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God” affirms one’s belief in the deity of Christ. The phrase “of the virgin Mary” affirms the belief that Christ was *born* and did not suddenly appear as a grown man as Marcion believed. The reference to Pontius Pilate establishes the birth of Christ as an historical event with a certain date, and the reference to His crucifixion, death, and resurrection is a refutation of Docetism which taught that Christ only appeared to die on the cross but actually abandoned the human Jesus shortly before the crucifixion. Marcion also did not believe that the true spiritual God would judge the world of sinners, a trait which Christ did not share with the vindictive God of the OT. But the creed affirmed that Christ would “return to judge the quick and the dead”.

The “holy catholic church” (originally “the holy church” found in the “symbol”) is not a reference to the Roman Catholic Church but the universal church in contradiction to the church that Marcion had established with its own bishops. Although Marcion and the Gnostics claimed direct succession from the apostles, the catholic or orthodox church could more easily demonstrate this succession since many of its churches had lists of bishops who could be traced back to the original apostles. Yet, it was the orthodox church (little “o”) which expressly denied any secret tradition given only to a few. Thus the idea of apostolicity (the foundation of the apostles) was not a matter of a particular church’s direct succession to the apostles, but a matter of subscribing to the apostolic faith which was open to all. The “catholic” faith was the total witness of the apostles handed down to the church which submitted itself to this witness. Only the church “according to the whole” (the catholic church) could claim to the entire tradition of the apostles. Centuries later in the history of the church, the meaning of “catholic” began to evolve into something related to the authority and person of Peter, a truly ironic twist of the original intention of the term (Gonzalez, pp. 64-66).

## **2. Montanism**

Unlike Marcionism, Montanism was generally orthodox. Its error consisted in the fact that Montanus claimed to have immediate and continuous inspiration from the Holy Spirit by which he gave leadership and guidance to the church. Thus, he believed in continuing revelation just as many Christians living today. He also believed that the earthly kingdom of God was soon to be realized in Phrygia where he had organized his ministry and that he would be given a place of special prominence in that kingdom. On a practical level, the Christian life should be lived according to a list of ascetic rules—no second marriage for widows or widowers, the eating of certain foods, fasting, etc. The sect was strongest in Carthage and the eastern portion of the empire and boasted the following of Tertullian, one of the fathers of the church.

At its base, Montanism reacted to the problems of formalism—namely, the emphasis upon the external organization of the church in its official leadership of elders and bishops. What the church needed, according to Montanus, was a deeper dependence upon the immediate leadership of the Holy Spirit who guided the church into all truth (Cairns, p. 102). Ironically, by arguing for this immediate communication, Montanus slipped into the authoritarian mode of leadership since he claimed to be the primary medium through whom the Spirit was communicating to His church. This inconsistency has proved to be the norm with movements like this throughout church history and down to this day. The argument is made that the church needs to be more sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and who can argue with this? But then the claim is made by the chosen few that they have more guidance from the Spirit than anyone else. Ecclesiologically, the result is much the same as the rule by bishops and elders, except that the leadership is far more authoritarian and arbitrary since one person claims to be the Spirit's special depository of truth.

On the positive side, Montanism highlights a very important truth of Christianity, that we are not limited in our access to God by the ordained leadership of the church. We have direct access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit.

## **3. Monarchianism**

Unlike Montanus, Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, was an outright heretic who denied the deity of Christ. By his own righteousness and the “penetration of his being by the divine Logos at baptism”, Jesus attained to divinity and became the savior, a teaching somewhat similar to Mormonism which maintains that Jesus *became* God progressively through his works. This is known as “Dynamic Monarchianism” and is also the teaching of Unitarianism. Modalistic Monarchianism was championed by Sabellius who taught that God did not exist in three persons simultaneously but manifested Himself in three different “modes”: in the OT as Father, in the Gospels as Son, and after the resurrection of Christ as Spirit. Today, the United Pentecostal Church holds to Modal Monarchianism (Cairns, pp. 102-103).

One can see then that Paul of Samosata was attempting to maintain the unity of God and the humanity of Christ but sacrificed the deity of Christ. Sabellius, on the other hand, maintained the divinity of Christ but sacrificed the Trinity or tri-personality of God. For him, God was not three persons but three modes or manifestations at different times in history.

## **4. Donatism**

See the discussion of Augustine below.

## ***VI. Constantine the Great and the Edict of Milan***

The church apologists and fathers we have mentioned so far lived during the bloody persecution of the church, either the general persecution beginning with Decius in 249 or during the local persecutions of other Roman emperors like Marcus Aurelius. Emperor Galerius in 311 had provided Christians with the right to assemble, but not until the Edict of Milan in 313 did Christianity win equal status with all other religions in the Roman Empire. In 306, Constantine had been declared emperor by the Roman army of Britain making him the supreme ruler of the Roman Empire in the West while his rival, Maxentius, continued to rule over the Roman Empire in Italy and North Africa. These two, Constantine and Maxentius, were now destined to face each other in battle. Catching Maxentius unprepared, Constantine's forces (40,000 in number) marched on Italy and faced off with 120,000 troops led by Maxentius, including the famous Praetorian Guard, the best soldiers of the Roman army (Kuiper, p. 23).

Constantine worshipped Mithra, the Persian sun-god of truth and justice, the preferred god of Romans soldiers. Being severely outnumbered, Constantine knew that his god would need to help him in battle. Traditional accounts of the story indicate that on the evening before the battle while looking at the sunset, he saw a cross above the sun with the words "In this sign conquer." Constantine defeated the superior army of Maxentius on the next day at Milvian Bridge, 312, making him the confirmed master of the western portion of the Roman Empire. (Ten years later in 322 he defeated Licinius to consolidate his mastery over the eastern portion.) He was convinced that the god of the Christians (one of many gods) had given him the victory, not Mithras. The next year (313) he issued the Edict of Milan which guaranteed toleration for all Christians in the empire.

Not only were Christians delivered from persecution and given the freedom to worship, they now had an emperor who himself professed to be a Christian (though it is doubtful that Constantine was ever a genuine Christian; cf. Gonzalez, pp. 120-123). From a tiny persecuted minority, Christians now moved into a favored position. Bishops and pastors received generous salaries from the State, elaborate church buildings were erected, Sunday was recognized as a day of rest, and high government positions were awarded to Christians (Houghton, pp. 121-122). But the blessings received were mixed with the temptation to embrace the Christian faith, not for the sake of truth alone, but for the temporal favors given to Christians. Even the bishops of larger churches began to live lavishly on the liberal salaries given them by the State. Thus began the "official theology" of the reign of Constantine with the common belief that the kingdom of God and the Roman Empire had merged into one, a view which was given thorough intellectual support by the ancient historian, Eusebius of Caesarea.

According to Eusebius, the events surrounding the victory of Constantine were similar to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. And just as Israel became free to participate in the theocracy led by Moses, the church was now free under Constantine to establish the kingdom of God on earth in the form of the Roman Empire, later to be developed as the ***Holy Roman Empire***. As the church fathers of the second century had merged Greek philosophy into Christian theology, so now Eusebius merged Roman political theory into Christian theology to promote the idea that Christianity was the "crowning touch on the best of Roman traditions". The kingdom of God, so ardently taught and expected by common Christians became, according to the "official theology", a realized kingdom in the form of the Roman Empire. There was nothing left to do but to have this kingdom personalized in the heart of each individual believer.

Those who reacted against this official theology were often branded as heretics (Gonzalez, p. 132-134).

One result of this “official theology” was the change in practice from the simpler form of church worship to more elaborate rituals. Instead of worshipping in private homes (Acts 12: 2; Rom. 16: 5; Col. 4: 15) and catacombs, Christians could now worship in the elaborate buildings (basilicas) built by Constantine and his successors to perpetuate (continue) the memory of their reigns. Pastors who had preached in ordinary clothes now began wearing expensive garments made especially for officiating at worship services which now began with formal processions accompanied by choirs. Congregational participation in the worship diminished accordingly. From this increasing emphasis on liturgy, the next logical step was the development of a “clerical aristocracy” similar to the imperial aristocracy of the Empire and just as out of touch with the common people (Gonzalez, pp. 124-125, 134).

## ***VII. The Latter Church Fathers***

Most of the church fathers lived during the time of Constantine and his successors and fought against the doctrinal heresies facing the church internally. There was no longer any external threat from Roman Emperors. The four most notable church fathers were Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome.

### ***A. Athanasius***

Athanasius defended the Christian faith against ***Arius*** who contended that Christ was not God but a created being who came into existence at his birth—“There was a time when the son was not.” Athanasius responded to Arius by writing the book, *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, which defended the true deity of Christ (Houghton, p. 21). Constantine convened a council of 300 bishops of the church in 325 AD, the Council of Nicea, which condemned ***Arianism*** as a heresy and formulated the Nicene Creed. It should be noted that the doctrine of the person of Christ was still being hammered out by church leaders three hundred years after the death of Christ. What appears to us in the NT as being obvious proof of the deity of Christ was not something which could be taken for granted by the early church fathers, but something which had to be rigorously defended. It is only because of this rigorous defense that modern-day believers enjoy a well-formulated tradition of the doctrine of Christ. God assembled the best minds of the church (all but seven from the eastern portion of the church) to develop the Christology of the church which has been passed down to us from generation to generation.

Regrettably, the fight against ***Arianism*** did not end with the Council of Nicea, and Athanasius had to defend the deity of Christ until his death. His struggle was taken up by the “***three great Cappadocians***: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. It took the church until 381 AD at the Council of Constantinople to fully condemn Arianism as a heresy, and even today Arianism exists in modern form as the heretical sect of the ***Jehovah’s Witnesses***. The ***Council of Constantinople*** was convened for the purpose of formulating the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In 381 the deity of the Holy Spirit was fully determined by the theologians of the church against Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople from 341-360, who taught that the Holy Spirit was “a minister and a servant” similar to the angels and was a creature subordinate to the Father and the Son (Cairns, p. 135). Biblical orthodoxy recognizes the ***functional*** subordination of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, but also teaches His ***ontological*** equality of essence as God.

The two natures of Christ in one person continued to be debated until the *Council of Chalcedon* in 451. Having established Christ's true deity, the church summoned 600 other bishops to firmly establish the true humanity of Christ. In the Chalcedonian formulation, Christ was one person with two distinct natures, human and divine, and these two natures exist in Christ without confusion, change, division or separation. This will be further explained below in our study of the Christological controversies.

### ***B. Ambrose***

Ambrose was one of the three Latin Church fathers (from the Western church) who lived from 340-397. Many Arians still existed in the church during his life since the Council of Nicaea in 325 did not completely solve the controversy. When the Bishop of Milan died, the Arians and the orthodox Christians (those holding to the Nicene Creed) contended with one another concerning his replacement. Ambrose, who was a government leader and not a baptized member of the church, was so respected by the church that he was elected as bishop of Milan. He is most remembered for his fearless opposition to Emperor Theodosius, who had massacred seven thousand people in Thessalonica for the murder of the governor. For this reckless display of injustice, Ambrose would not let the emperor take communion (Gonzalez, pp. 192-193).

His record of justice, however, was far from flawless. Christians in the small town of Callinicum had burned a Jewish synagogue. Theodosius had decided to punish the Christians for the arson and force them to rebuild the synagogue. Ambrose wrongly prevailed upon the emperor not to punish the arsonists or force them to rebuild. This set a bad precedent (a decision upon which further cases could be judged) of the minority religion, in this case Judaism, failing to receive justice under law. Christians should not be guilty of the same injustice for which they themselves have suffered.

### ***C. Jerome***

Jerome (340-420) was another of the Latin fathers who is best known as the monk who wrote the *Vulgate*, a Latin version of the Bible. Even today revisions of the *Vulgate* exert great influence upon the Roman Catholic Church. Jerome was one of the few Western theologians at the time who knew the Hebrew language, having learned it from Rabbis while living in Antioch and Bethlehem. While living in a cave in Bethlehem from 386 until his death in 420 (supposedly a cave next to the one in which Christ was born), he translated the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures into the Latin *Vulgate* (Kuiper, pp. 34-35).

### ***D. Augustine***

The most influential and best-known of all the Latin church fathers is Augustine (354-430). Having left the Christian faith as a young man, Augustine lived a life of wanton pleasure and debauchery. His mother Monica never gave up on him and prayed for him ceaselessly. His attitude began to change when he started listening to the preaching of Ambrose, bishop of Milan. The final turning point came after he had lost any hope of satisfaction in his profligate (immoral) life-style. Having gone out in the garden behind his house, he heard a little child next door singing a song, "Take up and read; take up and read." He had left a copy of Paul's epistles on the garden bench which he then turned to Rom. 13: 13-14, "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts." He was then 32 years old and became arguably the most brilliant theologian of the church

since the Apostle Paul. He was the bishop of Hippo in North Africa until his death in 430 (Kuiper, pp. 36-37).

Augustine became involved in three theological controversies during his lifetime—Manicheism, Donatism, and Pelagianism. *Manicheism* was a mixture of pagan philosophical thought and Christianity which captured Augustine's attention for nine years previous to his conversion in 386. *Donatism* was not a heresy but a schism between orthodox Christians. During the severe Diocletian persecutions of the church, many Christians had denied Christ in the face of persecution and death and some of the bishops had surrendered copies of the Bible to be burned. The Donatists did not believe such Christians or bishops should be readmitted into the church. The Donatists were named after Donatus who was named the rightful bishop of Carthage by the party refusing to allow lapsed members back into the church. Caecilian was named the rightful bishop by those who took a more lenient approach to lapsed members (members who had denied their faith in Christ in the midst of persecution). According to the prevailing opinion of the time, there could be only one bishop of Carthage at any one time; thus, a schism arose in the church as to who was the legitimate bishop.

Christians who had a change of heart and transferred their allegiance from the Caecilian party (the more lenient party) to the Donatist party had to be rebaptized. The reasoning for this was that any baptism by a lapsed bishop was illegitimate since he was not a true bishop. He had lost his status as bishop due to his denial of Christ or due to surrendering copies of the Bible to the persecutors for burning. Therefore, any baptism by someone who was not a true bishop—as defined by the Donatists—was not true baptism. The Caecilian party argued that members transferring their allegiance from the Donatist party to the Caecilian party did not have to be rebaptized since the validity of their baptism did not reside in the bishop doing the baptizing but in the validity of the sacrament itself. If, indeed, the validity of baptism was based upon the person administering baptism, then the baptized person could never be sure whether he was legitimately baptized; or if partaking of communion, the participant could never be sure whether the communion was effectual for his edification since the character of the bishop administering the communion could never be objectively determined (Gonzalez, pp. 153-154).

Even after the Donatist movement was declared an error, the movement continued primarily among the poorer classes in North Africa southwest of Italy—the northern parts of modern-day Tunisia and Algeria. It was partly a protest movement to what some Christians feared was the take-over of the church by the rich and powerful Roman members of the church who now embraced the faith partly because of the supposed conversion of Constantine (Gonzalez, p. 155). Augustine, for his part, took the side of the Caecilian party (otherwise known as the Catholics), and argued that the Catholic Church was the only church (Kuiper, pp. 38-39).

*Pelagius* was a British monk who denied that humanity is fallen in Adam and its consequence, the total depravity of man (that all of man's faculties—physical, mental, and spiritual—are affected by the fall). According to him, no one is born with a sinful nature, but acquires this sinful nature by observing the example of other sinners. The sinful nature of man, therefore, is not inherited from his parents but is acquired through environmental processes and negative socialization. Babies are innocent, born without sin, but become sinners through actions, not by natural birth. Repentance—turning from evil to good—is not dependent on the grace of God but is something man has within the power of his own will (Berkhof, p. 133). Pelagius also denied predestination which teaches that God has chosen some people to salvation before the foundation



of the world while passing over others and leaving them in their sin. Such a choice is based not on the inherent worth of the person or upon some foreseen decision for Christ on their part, but solely on the sovereign good pleasure of God (Kuiper, p. 39).

Against Pelagius, Augustine taught that all men are fallen in Adam and are corrupt from birth. We do not become sinners by virtue of any activity of sin; we become sinners through natural birth from our sinful parents who themselves are sinners. Therefore, we do not become sinners by sinning; we sin because we are already sinners by birth. Predestination, therefore, is absolutely essential since none of us would voluntarily submit our lives to Christ had we not been chosen before the foundation of the world. The grace of God is not given on the basis of foreseen faith, but is given to man in order that he can believe. The *prevenient* grace of God is that in which the Holy Spirit uses the law of God to produce a sense of sin and guilt. The *operative* grace of God consists in the work of the Spirit producing faith which leads to justification. The *co-operative* grace of God is the work of the Spirit which cooperates with the will of man in producing sanctification which leads eventually to the “transformation of the sinner into a saint” (Berkhof, p. 136). At first believing that election was based on God’s foreknowledge of man’s faith, Augustine’s continued study of the Scriptures led him instead to the conviction that man’s faith is itself the result of divine election.

In the Council of Ephesus in 431, *Pelagianism* was declared a heresy by the church, and the theology of Augustine became the dominate theology of the Catholic Church throughout the Middle Ages. Even the Protestant reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Luther and Calvin, continued developing the theology espoused by Augustine in the fifth century (Kuiper, p. 39).

Later on, the theology of Augustine was moderated by another theological movement known as *Semi-Pelagianism*, which was promoted by the monk, *John Cassian*. Cassian taught that the divine will and the human will cooperate in man’s salvation. Human corruption was not denied, but man’s nature did not become totally corrupted as the result of the fall, only diseased or weakened. Man retained the freedom of the will with which he is able to cooperate with God’s divine grace. Regeneration is not solely the work of God renewing the heart, but a coordinate activity between man and God. Predestination was taught as simply the election of man on the basis of foreseen faith and obedience. Semi-Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy by the Synod of Orange in 529 AD, over 100 years after Pelagius first began to teach his doctrines (Berkhof, p. 138; Cairns, p. 138).

Although condemned by the church, Semi-Pelagianism is the predominate belief of many, possibly most, evangelical Christians in the world today. It is known by another term, *Arminianism*, which we will discuss later. While not a soul-damning heresy like Gnosticism, Semi-Pelagianism nevertheless robs God the Father of His sovereign choice in election—since election is seen as God responding to man’s foreseen faith—and also robs God the Holy Spirit of His sovereign operation of grace in the heart of sinful man—since man is not viewed as spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins, but capable of cooperating with the divine operation of God. One should wonder how the Arminian or Semi-Pelagian interprets Paul’s statement to the Ephesians, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2: 1). Exactly how “dead” is “dead”? Can dead men believe the gospel?

While Augustinianism presents salvation as a bridge which God builds across the entire span of the chasm between God and man, Semi-Pelagianism presents salvation as a bridge which God

builds half-way across the chasm while man builds the other half. God and man then meet in the middle and shake hands, congratulating one another for a job well done. This is clearly not the teaching of Scripture which presents salvation as 100 % the work of God. God does 100 % of the saving, while man does 100 % of the sinning. Sanctification, on the other hand, is the work of God's grace which employs the efforts of the believer in growing in the knowledge and practical application of grace. Such cooperation between God and the believer is possible because of the renewal which has already taken place in regeneration and justification.

### ***VIII. Monasticism: a Reaction to the “Official Theology” of the Church under Constantine***

We have already noted that when the threat of persecution was lifted under the Edict of Milan in 313, drastic changes took place in the church in membership, worship, and leadership (See p. 23 of your notes). While Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, was convinced that the eschatological kingdom of God was being realized in his lifetime, there were others who were not so optimistic. Thousands were pouring into the church who had little understanding of the Christian faith, but were interested in the favored status of Christians under Emperor Constantine. Bishops competed with one another for prestigious, state-sponsored positions in the church, and the church came to be dominated by the rich and powerful. Satan was busy sowing his tares among the wheat (Matt. 13: 36-43). Thus, at the very moment in time that one threat was overcome, another more serious threat emerged—the absorption of the church into the world.

Accordingly, a reaction against worldliness and comfortable living arose within the church on the part of some who believed that ease and security were more dangerous to the church than persecution. Thus, the monastic ideal was born which rendered the church a revolving door. Thousands were coming into the church who were not true Christians, while thousands more were leaving at the same time as a reaction to worldliness in the church.

#### ***A. Solitary Monasticism***

There were basically two kinds of monasticism, solitary and communal. The solitary kind arose primarily in the Egyptian desert. The word, “monk”, is derived from the Greek word *monachos* meaning “solitary”, and solitude was the main thing the early monks were seeking. Two of the most famous monks, or “anchorites” were Paul and Anthony, whose biographies were written by two great theologians of the church, Jerome and Athanasius. Both of these men became solitary monks *before* the time of Constantine, and therefore, during the time of persecution. But when Constantine became emperor and the church began to swarm with nominal (in name only) Christians, the solitary life became increasingly popular. Monastic life was very austere, consisting of only the basic necessities for subsistence—mostly bread with occasional fruits and vegetables. Clothing was simple, and mats were used for sleeping. Most of them did not have many books since the possession of great learning could lead to pride, but they would memorize large portions of the Bible.

There were some very extreme forms of solitary monasticism known as the “stylites”. Simon lived on top of a pillar (or stylus) in Syria for thirty years. His last pillar was sixty feet tall with a small four foot square platform on top (Kuiper, p. 45). Supposedly, the temptations of the flesh would be rare on such a small platform raised sixty feet off the ground. One can only wonder how he survived 30 years of this. But monastic life did not prevent sinfulness, and later on many monks believed that their holier lifestyle—in their estimation—qualified them as the true teachers of the church who should be deciding its

doctrine. Many of them were fairly ignorant men whose knowledge of the Bible did not include anything but their own limited interpretations. Many were also given to fanaticism and were manipulated by the more educated bishops to their own advantage (Gonzalez, pp. 138-143).

## ***B. Communal Monasticism***

### ***(1) Pachomius***

As the popularity of monasticism grew, more people were withdrawing into the desert but were also seeking the help of experienced monks. Thus solitary monasticism gave way to another form of solitary life called communal monasticism. Pachomius is credited with being the primary organizer of this movement in the East. He first lived the life of an anchorite, a solitary monk, but received a vision in which an angel told him to serve mankind. He at first resisted the vision, preferring rather to serve God in solitude, but later changed his mind as well as the entire direction of monasticism. Those who were allowed under his instruction lived simply and learned to work with their hands as weavers, cobblers, bakers, etc, thus making the monastery completely self-sufficient. What they produced was exchanged in the market place for things they could not make or sold to provide relief to the poor. No task, however lowly, was beneath them, Pachomius himself assuming some of the most humble tasks in the monastery as an example to others. While working, the monks were encouraged to pray, sing hymns, and recite or meditate on passages of scripture. There were corporate prayers for all the monks twice a day in the morning and evening.

The hierarchical structure was clearly defined with each housing unit having a superior who in turn was subordinate to the superior of the monastery and his deputy. Pachomius was the superior of all nine monasteries he began. None of the Pachomian monks ever accepted ecclesiastical office.

### ***(2) Benedict***

The main organizer of Western communal monasticism was Benedict. Western monasticism was more practical, on the whole, than that of eastern monasticism. Monks were trained in a rigid disciplinary regimen, but the discipline was not for the purpose of self-renunciation, but missions. It differed, secondly, in its departure from solitude to organized life in community, something which Pachomius did in the East but was more characteristic in the West with the Benedictine Order. Third, although the solitary monks in the east were often at odds with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, this tension did not exist in the West except at certain periods. Instead, the monks were often formidable (powerful) allies of the popes, bishops, and other leaders of the church (Gonzalez, p. 238).

Benedict was born in 480 in Italy, seventy years after the city of Rome fell to the Goths. He grew up under the rule of the Ostrogoths who were Arians. When he was twenty years old he went off to live the life of seclusion in a cave, but, as with Pachomius in the East, he was soon surrounded by admiring disciples who desired his tutelage. His cave being thus overcrowded, he moved the community to Monte Cassino in Italy. He is known primarily for the Benedictine Rule or regimen of discipline required of everyone entering the order. Under this order, the monk was required to be absolutely obedient to the abbot, or the superior of the monastery, and to agree to spend the rest of his life in a particular monastery unless ordered to another location. Failure to comply meant being publicly reprimanded (rebuked) or eventual excommunication. Monks gathered for prayer and the reading of the Scriptures eight times daily resulting in most monks committing large portions of Scripture to memory. Unlike most of the earlier solitary

monks of Egypt, books were valued, and monasteries came to be places where the Scriptures and other books were copied prolifically (with abundance). Much of the scholarship of the Roman Empire was preserved during the barbarian invasions and the turmoil which followed only because of the tireless efforts of the monks. The monasteries also served as schools for children, as hospitals and pharmacies for the sick, and as safe hotels for travelers.

Economically, they added precious acres of farmland to the European landscape by clearing forests, and their methods of farming and animal husbandry, obviously superior to current practices, were imitated by the local population. Thus, work was not despised but elevated to the appropriate status of worship before God. To demonstrate this status, there was a ceremonious change of the weekly cooks during one of the worship services (Gonzalez, pp. 248-252).

### ***C. The General Effect of Monasticism upon the Church***

Through the influence of Athanasius and Jerome, the monastic way of life came to have greater effect upon the church. Athanasius visited the desert monks and when his life was threatened during the Arian controversy he sought refuge with them. Augustine partly owed his conversion experience to his reading of Athanasius' *Life of Saint Anthony* and actually lived as a monk for a time. Many came to the conclusion that the ideal of a true bishop was that of a monk; and so it was that the organized reaction to the worldliness of the church and its pompous bishops eventually left a lasting mark on the leadership of the church. "For centuries—and in some quarters to the present time—it was thought that a true bishop should approach the monastic ideal as much as possible. In that process, however, monasticism itself was changed, for whereas those who first joined the movement fled to the desert in quest for their own salvation as years went by monasticism would become—particularly in the West—an instrument for the charitable and missionary work of the church" (Gonzalez, p. 150).

While clearly not the ideal of the Christian life (Jn. 17: 15; 1 Cor. 5: 9-10), God nevertheless used monasticism to accomplish some important purposes, as we have already noted. Although the earlier monks were opposed to collecting books, the Western monks played a very important part in keeping scholarship alive during the so-called "Dark Ages" of the church between 500-1000 when the urban life of the Roman Empire was disrupted by barbarian invasions. Monks provided extensive copies of important manuscripts of the Bible which would otherwise have been lost to the church. Monks also became the first missionaries of the church, especially those who came from Britain. Columba, a monk from an Irish monastery, won the Scottish people to Christianity, and Patrick won the Irish. During the ravages of the barbarian invasions of the Western Roman Empire, which ceased to exist after 476, the monastic movement, along with the papacy of Rome, served to conserve what was left of western civilization.

On the negative side, much of the able leadership of the church was lost when these committed Christians decided to retreat to the monasteries. They also did not produce children who would take their places in the church later. As the monasteries became wealthy through thrift and self-sufficiency, many monks became greedy, lazy, and gluttonous. Although originally a reaction to the worldliness of bishops, the monastic lifestyle, with its emphasis on absolute obedience to one's superiors, contributed to the centralization of the church and its ultimate subordination to the bishop of Rome (Cairns, p. 155).

### ***IX. The Rise of the Papacy***

We have already noted that one response to heresies within the church, particularly Marcionism, was the elevation of the bishop above the other presbyters or elders in the church. It was widely believed that the bishop of each church was a key to the unity of the church and the purity of its doctrine. This setting apart of one man as the bishop above the other presbyters in the church cannot be exegetically supported from scripture which uses both terms—*presbuteros* and *episcopos*—interchangeably of the *same* people (cf. Acts 20: 17, 28). The distinction occurred because of historical circumstances and has been perpetuated (continued) down to this day known as the Episcopal form of government.

For some time all the bishops of churches were considered equal in rank, but eventually, the bishops of the larger churches rose in influence above the bishops of smaller churches in smaller cities. The cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome rose in prominence above all the other cities in the Roman Empire. The first four of these cities were in the eastern portion of the empire while the last one, Rome, was the only city in the western portion. At first the churches of the empire had only a very loose connection with one another, but this changed when the church began to face doctrinal heresies. By 150 the church had developed the Apostles' Creed, and for all practical purposes, the complete canon of Scripture lacking only a few epistles by 175. By 200 it had also come to be known as the Catholic or Universal Church in contrast to the many independent churches which were being started by heretical groups, including the Marcionites, and schismatic elements, including the Montanists. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in North Africa, did more than anyone to stress the importance of the universal church and its ordained leadership.

He who is not in the Church of Christ is not a Christian. He can no longer have God for His Father who has not the Church for his mother. There is no salvation outside the Church. The Church is based on the unity of the bishops. The bishop is in the Church, and the Church is in the bishop. If anyone is not with the bishop, he is not in the Church (Kuiper, p. 21).

Thus, the heresies of the church forced the church to unite together into a common whole. The other product of this unity was the increasing centralization of the church ending with the Roman Catholic Church and its separation from the Eastern Orthodox Church. There were several considerations which led to the rise of the Roman bishop as superior to the bishops of the other four eastern cities. First, was the theory that Christ had bestowed on Peter the honor of first place, primacy, above the other disciples (Matt. 16: 18). To him also were given the keys to the kingdom of heaven (16: 19) and the special commission to feed the flock of Jesus Christ (Jn. 21: 15-19). The typical protestant interpretation of the Matthew passage is that Peter's confession, not Peter himself, serves as the rock upon which Christ will build his church. At any rate, the Apostle Paul did not in any sense feel the weight of Peter's superiority when he publicly confronted him in Antioch for his vacillation (going back and forth) with the uncircumcised Gentiles (Gal. 2: 11-14; cf. 2: 6-10). It appears, then, that the ancient church did not think through all the implications of their decision to install Peter as the infallible pope of the Church. Nevertheless, this tradition has remained a hallmark of Roman Catholic doctrine.

Secondly, Rome enjoyed many other apostolic traditions which gave it special prominence in the eyes of the church. Both Peter and Paul had been martyred in Rome, and Rome had been the site of the earliest and most cruel persecutions of the church, first by Nero in 64. Thirdly, the weightiest of Paul's epistles had been written to the church in Rome; and fourthly, the Roman church was one of the largest and wealthiest of churches by 100. By 135, the church in

Jerusalem had lost all prominence when the city was destroyed again by Roman armies, and the church of Ephesus was compromised by the Montanist schism in the second century. Eventually, the place of preeminence lay between Rome and Constantinople (Cairns, pp. 116-117).

Along with the emphasis on the monarchical bishop, who had supremacy above the presbyters of any given church, came the idea of the bishop as the one who held the deposit of the truth and as the means by which God's grace is distributed to the common Christian through the sacraments. Only the accredited minister, who had now become known as the "priest", could perform the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Later the communion of the Lord's Supper came to be recognized as the re-sacrifice of Christ which contributed to the importance of this rite being performed by the authorized priest (Cairns, p. 119).

### ***X. The Fall of the Western Roman Empire***

Another important contributing factor to the rise of the papacy was the fall of the Western Roman Empire to barbarian invasions. Roman armies had been successful for centuries in holding the Germanic tribes to the north and the east at bay, but this success was not to last indefinitely. The German tribes themselves were also being pressed by the Mongolian Huns who were forcing them south of the Danube River. The Visigoths (Western Goths) were soon followed by the Ostrogoths (the Eastern Goths) in entering the forbidden domains of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor Valens lost his life in the battle of Adrianople in an attempt to turn them back. The Goths were finally subdued by Valens' successor, Emperor *Theodosius*, which left the eastern part of the empire secured against aggressors throughout the Middle Ages for another 1000 years until its fall to the Muslims in 1453.

Not giving up so easily, the Goths then directed their attention to the *western* portion of the empire. It took them 100 years before they were able to conquer it, from the crossing of the Danube in 376 to the official fall of Western Empire in 476. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine lived and wrote during this 100 year period of blood, gore, rape and pillage. The Goths destroyed churches and monasteries and carried away Roman citizens into slavery. The irony of this destruction is that the Goths had *already* converted to Christianity *before* they invaded Rome! The missionary bishop Ulfilas had translated a large portion of the Bible into Gothic which had been instrumental in reaching the Gothic people. But there was a slight catch—they had been converted to *Arian* Christianity. They appeared, then, to have no hesitation in attacking and killing orthodox Christians. Eventually, all these Arian hordes of barbarians were converted to orthodox Christianity, but not without difficulty (Kuiper, pp. 48-49, 52).

The city of Rome fell to the Goths, led by Alaric, in 410. Roman pagans who had never converted to the Christian faith blamed the fall of Rome on the Christians who had refused to worship the ancient gods, thus remembering the warning that Decius had made 150 years earlier. Augustine's answer to this accusation was his book, *The City of God*, in which he presented a comprehensive Christian philosophy of history. There were really only two cities in existence, the city of God and the city of man. The city of God was founded on the love of God while the city of man was founded on the love of self. With such a poor foundation, the city of man was doomed to fail as all earthly kingdoms do. Rome was allowed to exist for a long time to accomplish God's goal in proclaiming the gospel to the nations. Now that this goal was

accomplished, He had no more need of Rome and she was now being punished according to her deeds (Gonzalez, pp. 215-216).

No part of the Western Roman Empire escaped the invading Goths, Burgundians, Anglo-Saxons, and Vandals. Italy, North Africa, Spain, France, Britain, and the Netherlands were invaded and conquered. *Yet the Christian faith remained.* The progress of the kingdom of God is not dependent upon any earthly kingdom but will survive and thrive under any administration, however severe. This had already been proven during the many Roman persecutions.

The invading hordes had also unknowingly strengthened the position of the Roman bishop. Leo, the bishop of Rome, later to be called Leo the Great, had received word that Attila the Hun had already sacked Aquileia and was heading toward Rome. At the time, 452, the Western Emperor was impotent (as were all of the Western emperors after Rome fell in 410) and there was no Roman army between Rome and Attila to fight off the invaders. Leo left Rome and met Attila on the way. No record has been left to inform us of what he said to him, but Attila decided not to attack Rome but to advance northward. Years later, Leo did the same thing with the Vandals who sacked the city but were convinced by Leo not to burn it. Such daring courage elevated Leo in the eyes of all the church which led thereafter to papal supremacy in Rome. The power void left by the impotence of the Western emperor served as the means whereby the bishop of Rome would gain the political confidence of the downtrodden citizens of the Western empire overcome by invading barbarians. This confidence was to prove significant in the unfolding history of the Western church.

It was the barbarian invasions that brought about the great upsurge in the pope's authority. In the East, the Empire continued existing for another thousand years. But in the West the church became the guardian of what was left of ancient civilization, as well as of order and justice. Thus, the most prestigious bishop in the West, that of Rome, became the focal point for regaining a unity that had been shattered by the invasions (Gonzalez, p. 242).

## *XI. The Christianization of the Barbarians*

With the fall of Rome, *ancient history* came to an end and what is known as the *Middle Ages* began. The Eastern Roman Empire was still in tact in Constantinople which had been spared from the Goths by the leadership of Emperor Theodosius. It is known as the Byzantine Empire which served as the depository of learning and art which had been accumulated for centuries before the barbarian invasion of the West and which would continue to accumulate in the East throughout the Middle Ages—a period of 1000 years. This preservation of the arts and education would enrich the West later when it was exported from the Byzantine Empire to the West.

Though not completely “Christianized”, most of the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire professed to be Christians (Kuiper, pp. 51-52). The situation in the West was far different. Although the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, and Vandals were Arian “Christians” denying the deity of Christ, other barbarian hordes were heathen, including the Franks of what is now France, the Anglo-Saxons of Britain, and the Germanic tribes of Germany and the Netherlands. The Anglo-Saxons of Britain virtually wiped out any traces of the church in Britain which had been planted by Christian soldiers in the Roman army. As we have seen, the Arian Christianity of the Goths and Vandals did not prevent them from killing thousands of the inhabitants of the Western Roman Empire. Providentially, many of the monks of the Western Empire survived the carnage

(bloodshed) to become teachers and missionaries to the new peoples occupying the empire (Kuiper, pp. 53-54).

The Christian faith had conquered the Roman Empire from 30 AD to 313 AD, less than 300 years. But it had done so in a civilized world—so to speak—and, to a large part, under the protection of the Roman government—at least when there had been no organized persecution against it. Paul, a Roman citizen, had been able to travel freely from place to place. Now the church faced a different task of taking the gospel to a heathen world without political organization. Jesus' promise to Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church were proven to be true as one city gate after another was opened to the gospel. The heathen Franks were converted to orthodox Christianity by 500, the first German tribe to be converted after the barbarian invasion and the only German tribe which was not Arian. St. Patrick, a former British slave who became a monk, became the Apostle of Ireland, and by 461 the church had been firmly established in Ireland. Another Irish Monk, Columba, won the Scots to Christianity a hundred years later. It should be noted that neither Ireland nor Scotland were ever part of the Western Roman Empire. It should be remembered that Roman soldiers carried the gospel to Britain and from there it was carried to Ireland and Scotland. Another English Monk, Willibrord, evangelized the Netherlands from 690-739, followed by Boniface who received a commission from the Pope in Rome to evangelize Germany. The monk Augustine (not to be confused with Augustine of Hippo, the theologian) was sent by Gregory the Great to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons in 597 (Kuiper, pp. 54-56). God was not only reclaiming the territory lost in the barbarian invasions, but was extending the borders of Christianity beyond the original limits of the Roman Empire.

Some of the gains of the church were nominal—in name only—just as they had been with the thousands of people pouring into the church after the conversion of Constantine. When Clovis, king of the Franks, was baptized in 396, three thousand of his warriors were baptized with him. His conversion had been similar to that of Constantine. Before going into a major battle, he had seen a cross in the sky and vowed to become a Christian if he won the battle. The fact that his wife was a Christian no doubt played a large part in his decision. It makes one wonder how much of the gospel was really understood by him or by 3000 of his warriors. Likewise, it became common when kings were “converted” to Christianity that their tribes would be converted as well. This is not to imply that all these conversions were false, but that this kind of “evangelism” was considerably different from the evangelism of the persecuted church in Rome when Christians, at the risk of their lives, were sharing their faith in the gardens, kitchens, market places, and homes of rich Romans. In those days there was no mass evangelism, no “revival meetings”, no missionary organizations, and no dynamic preachers—just simple, dedicated Christians whose lives bore the difference of what Christ could do in a person's life.

On the other hand, we can't paint the whole picture with any broad strokes of the brush. We should not generalize by saying that there were few genuine conversions. This would, indeed, be a dishonor to the courageous monks who became missionaries to the heathen tribes. We have already made mention of Boniface who became a missionary to the Germans. The German god was Thor, the god of thunder. In the city of Geismar, Germany there was a famous oak tree which was believed to be sacred to the god of Thor and revered by the people there. For some time Boniface was unable to convince the people to turn away from their idols and serve the true God, until he decided to do something risky. He took an axe and began to chop the tree down. With the first blow the people expected Thor to strike him dead, but as the ancient story



goes, a sudden powerful wind split the huge tree into four parts. Boniface then cut the tree into planks to be used in the building of a church. Thus was the end of Thor worship in the city of Geismar. Boniface later took the gospel to Frisia where his ministry met with great success but also with great resistance. In the act of baptizing many converts, Boniface and 51 of his followers were murdered, believing that the example of Christ in His betrayal at Gethsemane should be the model rather than armed resistance (Houghton, pp. 48-49).

## ***XII. Pope Gregory the Great and the Medieval Church***

Beginning with Leo the Great (Leo I), the political power of the West and its religious authority came to reside in the same person, the bishop of Rome. Leo I became the first “pope” in the modern sense of the word and the “focal point for regaining a unity that had been shattered by the invasions”. All the traditional arguments for papal authority are found in Leo’s writings, including the appeal to Peter as the first pope (Gonzalez, pp. 242-243).

Since Odaocer, king of the Heruli people, had deposed the last emperor of the Western empire in 476, officially ending the Western Roman Empire, Italy became officially part of the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople. Yet, no significant help was coming from the East to protect the people or the pope. This indifference had been amply (sufficiently) proven when Leo appealed to the Eastern emperor for help against Attila the Hun in 452 and against the Vandals in 455 with no success. Instead, he took matters into his own hands on both occasions (see above) and won the respect and popularity of all the people of the Western Empire, thus laying the groundwork for the papacy of Rome. Increasingly, then, the people of the Western Empire looked to the pope not only for religious guidance but political guidance as well. When ***Clovis***, king of the Franks, was converted to the orthodox faith, according to the standards of the Council of Nicea, his conversion proved to be one of the most significant events in the history of the Western Empire. Increasingly, the Pope of Rome would look to the Franks for military protection which culminated (reached its highest point) in the crowning of Charlemagne as the Western emperor by the pope of Rome in 800 (Kuiper, p. 55; Gonzalez, p. 238).

While the West was continuing to suffer from the invasions of the barbarians, the East enjoyed a brief resurgence (renewal of strength) under the leadership of ***Justinian***, the Eastern emperor, until his death in 565. Through the efforts of his most able general, Belisarius, Justinian was not only able to keep the Ostrogoths out of the Eastern Empire, but was also able to break their power over Italy in the Western Empire. The Vandals in North Africa had also been defeated under Justinian’s reign. ***This did not, however, improve the state of the church in the West since Justinian high-handedly attempted to bring the church under the domination of the emperor, a situation which had prevailed in the Eastern Empire for some time—a state in which the patriarchs (bishops) of the Eastern church were forced to submit to the power of the emperor.*** The next few popes of Rome were simply puppets (leaders who do what they are told) to Emperor Justinian. After his death in 565, the power of the Eastern Empire began to diminish and a standing army from Constantinople (capital of the Eastern Empire) to protect the Western Empire was no longer possible. Having been freed from the Ostrogoths, Italy was then attacked by the Lombards from the north in 568 but received no help from the Eastern Empire.

It was in the chaos of the Western Empire that Gregory the Great (Gregory I) was born in Rome in 540. At the time of his birth, Justinian was still reigning in the East. Belisarius, Justinian’s general, had been able to retake Italy from the Ostrogoths, but his victory was short-lived since

the Ostrogoths were able to retake Rome in 545. Shortly thereafter, Belisarius was able to retake the city again only to lose it once again. Thus, for some time Rome had been under one siege after another rendering the city in political and religious ruins. The aqueducts (channels bringing water into the city) and the sewage system had fallen into disrepair leading to widespread disease and ultimately an epidemic. By 586, there was little hope that Rome would survive. Pope Pelagius had died, who with the help of Gregory, had been able to organize sanitation efforts in the city, the burial of the dead, and feeding the hungry. Gregory had served up until this time as the abbot (head monk) of the Benedictine monastery in Rome, and he had no desire to become the next pope, but his significant leadership skills led to his election, an election he attempted to annul but unsuccessfully.

Though he did not attempt to strengthen the mixture of political and religious authority (as did Leo), *Gregory the Great*—who served as the pope of Rome from 590 to 604) did more to consolidate (combine into a whole unit) the power of the pope in Rome than anyone else simply by his achievements. He was able to organize the distribution of food among the needy, organize the continuing shipments of wheat from Sicily to Rome, supervise the repair of the aqueducts and walls of the city, restore honor and morale to the city's garrisoned soldiers, and negotiate peace with the invading Lombards—not exactly the ordinary routine for a monk. His favorite work was that of preaching (with the allegorical method) and teaching in which he continually called the people to faithful commitment. He was an ardent supporter and promoter of clerical celibacy, but also missions, and it was Gregory who sent the monk, Augustine, to Britain to spread the gospel among the Anglo-Saxons (Gonzalez, pp. 243-246). Thus, he was very much concerned for the propagation (spread) of the gospel.

Though he considered himself the patriarch of the West, he never claimed universal authority over the church, as did Leo, but neither did he allow anyone else to claim such a title. For the most part he was a very humble man who shunned the extravagance of the rich and used his vast inheritance, instead, to start seven monasteries (Cairns, p. 167-168). Even more than his deeds, his writings spread his influence throughout the Western church, and he is considered by some historians as being one of the four “great doctors” of the Western church along with Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome (Cairns, p. 169). Gregory actually considered himself a loyal student and admirer of the great Augustine of Hippo, and he claimed to be saying nothing which had not already been taught by Augustine. However, there was a significant difference between the theology of Augustine and Gregory. As Gonzalez has noted, “What for Augustine was conjecture [an educated guess], in Gregory became a certainty.” Augustine had suggested that there might be a place of purification for sinners before going to heaven, a notion which Gregory formulated into the doctrine of *purgatory*. Augustine's *predestination* and *irresistible grace* were set aside and the doctrines of *penance* and *priestly absolution* were established for the satisfaction of sins—going beyond the scriptural teaching of Christ's atonement as the only thing sufficient or necessary for forgiveness. Without offering penance for every sin, a Christian would go to purgatory, and others could shorten the time of their beloved one's purgatory by offering masses in their favor. As for the mass, Gregory taught that the elements in communion represented the actual sacrifice of Christ each time communion was offered—a belief which became the standard doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church (Gonzalez, pp. 246-247). He also taught that the departed saints of the church could be summoned in our favor, thus giving rise to the practice of praying to the saints rather than to Christ directly (Cairns, p. 169).

On baptism, Gregory taught that baptism affects a change in man by producing faith and canceling the guilt of past sins. It renews the will and fills the heart with the love of God, thus enabling man to merit something from God. Predestination was defined only as God's choosing of the elect based on foreseen faith on their part. In other words, God foresees who will believe and elects them to eternal life accordingly, thus making the foreseen faith of man the ground or basis of His choice, a semi-Pelagian position.

### ***XIII. Tension between the Western Popes and the Emperors of the Eastern Empire***

After Gregory died in 604, his successors did not attain to his stature, and there was increasing tension between the bishops of Rome and the emperor of Constantinople. Theological controversies relating to the person of Christ plagued the Eastern church, and the Eastern emperors demanded support for their views from the Western popes. Harsh treatment awaited the popes who refused to comply with these demands, illustrated by the kidnapping of Pope Martin I and the cutting out of the tongue and chopping off of the right hand of his loyal supporter, the monk Maximus, followed by his being sent into exile. The oppressive power of the Byzantine (Eastern) emperor was overwhelming, and not until Gregory III, 130 years after Gregory I (or Gregory the Great), was any pope consecrated in Rome without the confirmation of an emperor in Constantinople (Gonzalez, p. 248). The tensions between the church and the state were nothing new, and throughout the history of the church, this problem took one form or another—sometimes the state or the emperor prevailing over the church, and at other times the church or the pope prevailing over the emperor.

In the East, the emperors always kept the patriarchs (the bishops of churches) on a short leash. It was very common for emperors to intervene in the affairs of the church and eventually decide the outcome of theological debates—a task for which they were inadequate and inept. This precedent (an act which leads to other similar acts) had begun with Constantine who had played a large role in the Council of Nicea in 325). Thus, in the fifth century (400-500) the common practice was to appeal to the Eastern, Byzantine emperor, for support which would eventually decide the outcome of theological controversies. To be expected, the emperors would often make their decisions not on the basis of *theological arguments* which they *did not* understand, but on the basis of *political advantage* which they *did* understand. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Eastern church throughout the Middle Ages was theological controversy (Gonzalez, p. 251). This controversy would prove to be both a blessing and a curse. It would be a blessing in that the important Christological doctrines of the church would be hammered out and formulated for the future of the church. It would prove a curse in that while the church should have been evangelizing the neighboring nations of the Eastern Empire, they were too busy “doing theology”. The question is not *which* task the church should have been doing; it should have been doing *both*. We have seen that when the Western Empire fell to the invading barbarians in the fifth century officially ending the Western Roman Empire in 476, the church responded by converting the Arian barbarians to the orthodox, Nicene faith. Missionary monks were sent to Britain, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany. The Franks who had invaded Gaul (modern day France) were converted to the Nicene faith and would prove to be the military protectors of the Christian faith against the invading Muslims from Spain. ***In contrast to the West, the Eastern Church was not oriented toward missions.*** Today in Istanbul (modern Constantinople), there is scarcely a trace of the church left—only some 4000 Christians in the whole country of Turkey consisting of 63 million people.

#### ***XIV. Theological Controversies in the Eastern Church***

The true deity of Christ was confirmed in the Council of Nicea in 325 and reaffirmed in the Council of Constantinople in 381. Arianism held that Christ was a created being who was not of the same substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. Arius was eventually defeated through the tireless efforts and suffering of Athanasius—exiled five times—who continued to insist that man’s salvation is dependent upon the deity of Christ who is one substance with the Father (Cairns, p. 134). He died without seeing the end of this victory, but his struggle was continued by the three “Great Cappidoceans”—Gregory of Nyssa, his brother Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea. As we have learned from the study of the barbarian invasions, Arianism did not die with these councils but continued to influence the church. It also spread to the barbarians north of the Western Empire—the Goths, the Vandals, and the Lombards—so that most of the barbarian hordes invading the Western Empire had already been converted to Arian “Christianity” (which is not true Christianity) before they conquered the Western Empire. Yet, the orthodox church of the Western Empire was successful in converting these Arian invaders to the orthodox or Nicene faith.

In Carthage (North Africa), the church father, Tertullian, had coined the term “Trinity” as far back as the year 200. He had also taught that Christ was a single person with two natures, one human and one divine, a formula which the Western church was content to affirm throughout the theological controversies of the East. Besides, the Western church had enough to deal with while the barbarian hordes were taking over the Western Empire (Gonzalez, p. 252)!

The Eastern church, on the other hand, was divided between the theologians of Antioch (the Antiochene faction of Syria) and those of Alexandria (the Alexandrine faction of North Africa). Both factions agreed that the divine was *immutable* (unchangeable) and *eternal*. The question which fueled the dispute was how God could be joined to a mere human who was both subject to change (“And Jesus kept *increasing* in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”—Lk. 2: 52) and historical (that is, who had a historical *beginning* in time). The Alexandrian school believed with Clement of Alexandria (the latter part of the second century) and Origen (the first part of the third century) that the divinity of Christ must be defended at all costs, even at the expense of His humanity. The Antiochene school, on the other hand, believed that if the humanity of Christ was not upheld, He could not be the savior of the world. Both the Antiochenes and the Alexandrians believed in the divinity and humanity of Christ, but *how* this union was to be understood was the subject of their differences (Gonzalez, p. 252).

Gonzalez describes the controversy as taking place in *stages or episodes*. The *first stage* of the controversy began before the Trinitarian issue was fully decided—that is, before the Arian heresy had been fully defeated. Between the Council of Nicea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople in 381, *Apollinaris*—who had been a personal friend of Athanasius and a champion of orthodoxy for years—taught that the Logos or eternal Word of God, the second Person of the Trinity, was substituted for the rational soul or human spirit of Jesus. According to Apollinaris, Jesus did not have a human intellect or human spirit. While this explanation was acceptable to the Alexandrine school, the Antiochenes objected that if this were true, Jesus was not fully human. Gregory of Nazianzus argued that only that part of man which is fully assumed by the divine Christ could be saved. That which was not assumed is not saved; therefore, if the mind of man is not assumed by the divine, then man’s intellect is not saved or healed from sin. Man’s whole nature, body and spirit, had to be taken up by Christ if man is to be renewed.

**Apollinarianism** was condemned as a heresy by the Synod of Alexandria in 362 and later by the Council of Constantinople in 381 (Gonzalez, p. 253; Berkhof, p. 103).

[Apollinarius came to his conclusions when he was sixty years old. He is one example among many of older Christian scholars making serious theological mistakes later in life, John Stott being another who ten years ago substituted the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked for the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell. We should not make the mistake, however, of discounting the previous teaching and service of such scholars because of a single error in their theology.]

The **second episode** in the Christological controversy began with **Nestorius**, bishop of Constantinople in 428, a member of the Antiochene school of thought. Nestorius denied that the term *theotokos*, “mother of God” could be applied to Mary. His motive in this denial was to preserve the true humanity of Jesus, but the end result was that the humanity and deity of Jesus were combined in a mechanical unity rather than an organic unity in one person (Cairns, p. 136). **Cyril** of Alexandria argued that if Mary was not the mother of God—that is, the mother of one person who is also the divine person—then there was no true incarnation of God in human flesh, but only the assumption of a single human personality into fellowship with the divine Logos. Although Nestorius believed in the two natures of Christ, he did not believe that the two natures were combined into a single person. Rather, **the two natures are two distinct persons**. Mary gave birth to the human nature and the human person but not to the divine nature and the divine person. According to Nestorius, there was no single self-consciousness of Christ, but two separate self-consciousnesses (plural) existing alongside of each other. Cyril argued that **the two natures of Christ were joined together in one Person**, and that the human nature of Christ was dependent on the divine nature which used the human nature as His instrument. The ecumenical council (or general church council) of Ephesus was convened in 431 to decide this issue (Gonzalez, p. 254).

The Nestorian party which included John of Antioch was delayed two weeks, so that Nestorius was not able to defend his position before the council. In his absence Nestorius was branded as a heretic. A few days after this decision the Nestorian party arrived in Ephesus and ruled that Cyril was the real heretic, and reinstated Nestorius as the patriarch or bishop of Constantinople. Finally, Theodosius II, the Eastern Emperor, had both Cyril and John of Antioch arrested and ruled that the decisions of both parties were null and void. In 433, an agreement was reached between John of Antioch and Cyril of Alexandria in which the judgment of Nestorius as a heretic was confirmed. Nestorius lived out the rest of his life in exile (Berkhof, pp. 103-105; Gonzalez, pp. 253-254).

One can see, then, that theological controversies became the jurisdiction of the state in which the person judged as a heretic could be banished into exile by the emperor. Yet, with the passing of the OT theocracy, there appears in the NT a clear division of responsibilities between the church and the state in which the church can provide moral influence over the state through the teaching of Scripture and in which each Christian must be submissive to the laws of the state so long as these laws do not cause him to violate the laws of God. In ancient medieval culture, however, there was no clear-cut division of sovereignty between church and state, and both the church and the state remained in tension with one another as to which would be the dominating force in the culture. This tension had begun as far back as the Council of Nicaea in 325 which had been called by the Emperor Constantine. It was here that the church began to lose some jurisdiction

over its internal affairs, and while the Western church was eventually able to rise above the domination of the emperor, the Eastern church was never able to do so (Cairns, p. 135).

Thus, the *second* episode in the Christological debate ended with a victory for the Alexandrian party, but this victory was short-lived. The *third* episode in the debate centered around *Eutyches*, a monk in Constantinople who argued that Christ was one substance (*homoousias*) with the Father but was not one substance with man. He also believed either that the human nature was absorbed into the divine nature or that the two natures of Christ were fused into one another resulting in a “tertium quid”—an uncertain or unclassifiable nature—perhaps a god-ish man or a man-ish God who was neither perfectly God nor perfectly man. Eutyches was opposed by Flavian who was the patriarch of Constantinople. [Bishops were called patriarchs in the Eastern church.] Flavian accused Eutyches of a position too similar to the Docetists who taught that Christ only appeared to be human. The Council of Ephesus was called in 449 by Emperor Theodosius II. *Dioscorus*, who had succeeded Cyril as patriarch of Alexandria, was appointed by Theodosius II as the president of the assembly in Ephesus in 449. The council was seriously mismanaged by Dioscorus who ruled over it as a tyrant rather than a servant of Christ.

A letter (known later as the *Tome*) was written by Pope Leo the Great (who faced off with Attila the Hun three years later) to Flavian, patriarch of Constantinople. This letter essentially reiterated (repeated) the doctrine of the two natures of Christ existing in one person, the teaching of Tertullian 250 years earlier. However, this letter was not allowed to be read in the assembly essentially neutralizing the influence of the Western church. Flavian was physically assaulted resulting in his death a few days later. *The teaching of the two natures of Christ was declared to be heretical* as well as all of the Antiochene school. As it turned out, Theodosius II had received a large amount of gold from Alexandria that had apparently influenced his decision in their favor.

[Since theological controversies became mixed up with politics and emperors, purchasing the outcome of theological controversies was only a short step away. This can still happen today when money becomes involved. Pastors can easily allow themselves to be swayed toward one theological position or another based on which theological party promises them financial rewards—or which faction in the church controls their pension (retirement) plans. The Church of Uganda is to be commended in this regard for its refusal to accept financial donations from the US and UK from the liberal Anglican or Episcopal hierarchy which promotes the homosexual agenda. Recently I heard of an Episcopal minister in the US who gave up his pension with the Episcopal Church by joining his congregation to the Church of Uganda. Likewise, there were many conservative congregations belonging to the Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS) back in the 1970’s who were willing to give up their church buildings rather than remain in a liberal denomination which promoted homosexuality and other liberal agenda. Thus was born the Presbyterian Church of America, a conservative Presbyterian denomination.]

But God was not going to be mocked by Emperor Theodosius’ greed. On one of his rides, his horse stumbled, causing the emperor to fall and break his neck. He was succeeded by his sister Pulcheria and her husband Marcian, who agreed with Pope Leo in the West that the Council of Ephesus in 449 was a mockery of justice. A new council was called in 451 which became known as the Council of Chalcedon, the fourth Ecumenical Council of the church. In this council both Dioscorus and Eutyches were condemned, and all others who were condemned in 449 were forgiven. Essentially, Tertullian’s teaching 250 years earlier of the two natures of Christ in one person was reaffirmed by the Council of Chalcedon thus giving the Western church a new level of prestige both in the West and in the East. The Council of Chalcedon gave the church a new “Definition of Faith”, read as follows:

Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all with one voice teach that it is to be confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, perfect in divinity, and perfect in humanity, true God and true human, with a rational soul and a body, of one substance with the Father in his divinity, and of one substance with us in his humanity, in every way like us, with the only exception of sin, begotten of the Father before all time in his divinity, and also begotten in the latter days, in his humanity, of Mary the virgin bearer of God.

This is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, manifested in two natures without any confusion, change, division or separation. The union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each are kept, and both are joined in one person and hypostasis. They are not divided into two persons, but belong to the one Only-begotten Son, the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. All this, as the prophets of old said of him, and as he himself has taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers has passed on to us (Quoted from Gonzalez, p. 257).

Louis Berkhof explains the implication of this formula:

(1) The properties of both natures may be attributed to the one Person, as for instance, omniscience and limited knowledge. (2) The suffering of the God-man can be regarded as truly and really infinite, while yet the divine nature is impassible [incapable of suffering]. (3) It is the *divinity* and not the *humanity* that constitutes *the root and basis of the personality of Christ*. [Which means that the Person of Christ existed as God eternally *before* the humanity of Christ came into being as Jesus, the son of Mary, in the incarnation.] (4) The Logos did not unite with a distinct human *individual*, but with a human *nature*. There was not first an individual man, with whom the Second Person in the Godhead associated Himself. The union was effected with the substance of humanity in the womb of the virgin. [That is, there was no preexisting human being who assumed the divine nature but just the reverse, a preexisting divine Person, Christ, who assumed a human nature, but not a human personality. This goes along with the idea that the basis of Christ's personality is the divine and not the human nature.] (*The History of Christian Doctrines*, pp. 107-108; clarifications in brackets and emphasis mine).

This definition was a clear victory for the Western church which had long affirmed the teaching of Tertullian basically repeated in Leo's Tome. Increasingly Rome became the center of theological orthodoxy. Most of the Eastern church was in agreement with the definition given by the Council of Chalcedon, but not all. There were many monks in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine which still held to the teaching of Eutyches, thus believing that the human and divine natures of Christ merged into something which was neither perfectly human nor perfectly divine. Those holding to this position became known as *Monophysites*—Christ does not have two natures but a single (mono) composite nature consisting of the human and the divine. The Monophysites were afraid of attributing to Christ two *natures* which would, in their estimation, involve two *persons* and not just one. The Monophysite heresy continued to be a problem in the Eastern Empire until the middle of the sixth century and even today there are 15 million Monophysites in the Coptic churches of Egypt, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Turkey, and Russia (Cairns, p. 136).

Another sect arose among the Monophysites known as the *Monothelites* who taught that there was only one *will* in Christ. Included in this controversy would be the question of whether Christ was capable of shrinking from the suffering of the cross ("My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as *I* will, but as *Thou* wilt"—Matt. 26: 39). Can we infer (deduce) from this statement that the will of Christ as a man and the will of Christ as God were two different wills? The Council of Constantinople in 680 decided that Christ possessed two wills—the human will subordinate to the divine will—and this became the orthodox position for the church (Berkhof, pp. 109-110).

*John of Damascus* became the chief theologian for the Eastern church in the eighth century and taught that the Logos assumed human nature and not *vice versa* (the other way around). A human individual did not assume the Logos or the divine nature. The implication of this is that the divine nature of Christ, the Logos, is the "controlling agency" which affects the unity of the two natures. The human nature which Christ assumed was not a fully developed human nature

or personality. This human nature owes its existence to the Logos or the person of Christ. Other than the work of John of Damascus, the theology of the Eastern church has remained somewhat stagnant partly because of the domination of the church by the state. His most important work, *Fountain of Wisdom* in three volumes, became to the Eastern church what the *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas became to the Western church in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Cairns, p. 137, 188).

Although most heresies originated in the East, the heresy of *adoptionism* developed in Spain, the Western part of the church, which taught that Christ *became* the son of God by adoption in the same way we become the sons of God by adoption. This heresy denies the *eternal* sonship of Christ and the fact that he is the only *begotten* son of God (Berkhof, p. 111).

There was a distinct difference of orientation between the Eastern and the Western church to theological issues. The controversies in the East affected the Western church very little since the West had long held the teaching of Tertullian on the Trinity and the person of Christ, perhaps without much critical analysis. Furthermore, the Western mind was not as given as much to philosophical distinctions and theological “hairsplitting” as the Eastern church. [Have you ever attempted to split a hair into two parts?] Rather, the orientation of the Western church was on the more practical issues of the nature of man and the way of salvation, a fact which is evident in the work of Augustine and his opposition to Pelagius (Cairns, p. 137). This does not mean that the work of Eastern theologians was not equally important. Without the true humanity and deity of Christ there is no salvation, and men like Athanasius are heroes of the faith no less than those who were martyred. Yet, it seems that the Western church was willing to accept this mystery as simply taught in the Scriptures without the need for intensive speculation on how this union could be achieved. The same was true for the Trinity. This doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture but without explanation.

## ***XV. The Church Faces Islam***

While the Eastern Empire escaped the destruction and overthrow of the barbarians from the north, it did not escape the struggle to survive this threat. For fifty years after the fall of the Western Empire in 476, the East had to repel attacks from the German tribes attempting to breach (cross) its borders from the north. Having successfully beaten them in the East, Emperor Justinian was also successful in taking Italy back from the Ostrogoths and North Africa back from the Vandals—both of whom had previously been converted to Arian Christianity. Emperor Heraclius waged a successful campaign against the invading Persians decisively defeating them in the battle of Nineveh in 627. Although the Byzantine (Eastern) Empire survived until 1453, it did not survive with all its provincial lands in tact. From the South the empire was attacked by the Muslims who had been inspired by their prophet, Mohammed (Kuiper, pp. 62-63).

***Mohammed*** was born in Mecca in 570. As a boy he grew up as a shepherd and a camel driver but later became a merchant. He had come in contact with Christianity in Arabia, some of the Christian sects of unorthodox faith. This contact with the Christian faith and the Bible will explain why some of the *Koran* (or Quran) is so similar to the Bible. He married a rich widow named Khadijah whose wealth freed him to pursue religious studies and meditation. In 610, he claimed he had been given a message by the angel Gabriel (obviously borrowed from the Bible) and that the message consisted in the one central truth that God was one and that he, Mohammed, was His prophet to proclaim this message. He claimed that his teaching was nothing new but only what had been revealed in the Hebrew prophets—25 in all including



Abraham, Moses—and in the teaching of Jesus, a great prophet who made no claims of being God. Mohammed claimed to be the latest and greatest prophet.

Being a monotheist, Mohammed was rejected by his own polytheistic people in Mecca and had to flee to the oasis of Medina, later to become a great city itself. This flight of 622 is today celebrated by Muslims as the *Hegira*. His teaching received a warmer welcome in Medina which became the first Muslim community in which not only the religious life of the people but their economic, civil, and social life was regulated by the principles of Mohammed found in the *Koran*. From the very beginning, the Muslim faith included the military conquest of those who refused to submit to Allah and his prophet voluntarily. One could either submit and become a Muslim, or become a second-class citizen who was heavily taxed and subjected to mistreatment, or he could die by the sword. However, there is some difference of opinion as to how much religious freedom was afforded to their captives. There is nothing true about the modern claim that the Muslim faith is a “peaceful religion”. Mohammed and his followers were strong enough in a few years to take Mecca by military force. In ten short years, from 622 to his death in 632, the Muslims had become a military and religious power to be reckoned with (Kuiper, pp. 62-63; Gonzalez, pp. 248-249; Cairns, p. 173,175).

Unlike many movements which lose momentum and even disappear with the death of their leader, the Muslim faith under the *caliphs* (successors to Mohammed) actually gained momentum after Mohammed’s death. Under Abu Bakr (632-634), the Muslims consolidated their power over Arabia, and many parts of the Eastern Empire were conquered by Omar from 634-644. Syria fell to the Muslims in 635 and Jerusalem in 638. The entire region of Syria and Palestine fell to the Muslims two years later. Alexandria, which for years had been a center for theological study, fell in 642 along with Egypt in which Cairo was established. Cairo would become the intellectual center of the Muslim faith as the replacement for Christian Alexandria. The whole Christian civilization of North Africa fell to the Muslims during the second half of the seventh century. Carthage, home of Tertullian in the third century, fell in 695. Spain was lost to the Muslims in 711 and was not regained for the Christian faith until 1492, eight hundred years later. The Muslims laid siege against Constantinople at two different times but were not able to take it. Sadly, there had been so much strife and even persecution among the differing factions of the Christian church in the Eastern Empire that nominal Christians gladly welcomed their Muslim conquerors and converted to the Muslim faith (Gonzalez, p. 249; Kuiper, p. 63, 68).

But the time would come in which God would say to the Muslim conquerors, “Thus far but no farther.” He had already made preparations for their defeat as far back as 496, over two hundred years earlier. In that year, the Frankish king, Clovis, had been “converted” (perhaps) to the Christian faith, and the Franks had become orthodox Christians—the first barbarian conquerors to convert to the Nicene faith. Clovis’s sons were incompetent and profligate (shamelessly immoral), and therefore the kingdom was administered by the “Mayors of the Palace”. Pepin of Heristal was the first of the mayors who led the Franks from 687-714 in the place of Clovis’ descendents. Pepin himself was not exactly a model of virtue, having fathered an illegitimate son whose name was Charles. Charles assumed the duties of his father as Mayor of the Palace after 714, and it was his superior skill as a warrior which turned back the Muslim threat at Tours in 732, for which he would be called Charles Martel, “The Hammer” (Cairns, pp. 182-183).

Charles faced a Muslim force of thousands of experienced cavalry who had never known defeat from any country or any army. Against them stood Charles’ force of inexperienced foot soldiers

who had rallied to his call from all over Europe. Time after time the Muslim cavalry stormed against the tight line of the Frankish army only to meet a “brick wall” of resistance. This continued for seven days until the Muslims had had enough and retreated over the Pyrenees Mountains back into Spain. Western Europe was thus saved for the Christian faith, something which did not escape the notice of the Western church whose Pope Leo III later crowned Charlemagne as emperor of the Western Empire in 800, roughly 70 years later (Kuiper, pp. 64-65).

Though Western Europe was saved and has remained nominally Christian, the losses of the church in the East were devastating, from which it has never recovered. North Africa, Palestine (apart from the Jewish faith), Egypt and Syria—once Christian—are still Muslim lands which have never been recovered from the Muslim invasions of the seventh century. Important Christian cities like Jerusalem, Syrian Antioch, Alexandria of Egypt, Hippo and Carthage of North Africa, have been lost to the Christian faith for centuries. Iran, which is modern day Persia, was also lost to the Muslims, as well as India (Kuiper, pp. 65-66). After the Muslim conquests, the Eastern Empire was reduced to what is now Turkey and its holdings in Eastern Europe (Gonzalez, p. 250).

How did this happen? Some historians have pointed out that while the embattled church in the West continued to grow by evangelizing their oppressors, the church in the East stagnated and became engrossed only in theological controversy. You will recall that the city of Rome first fell to the Goths in 410 and the Western Empire officially fell in 476. Throughout this time period, one theological heresy after another arose in the East with the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon being called in 431 and 451 respectively. But even before this period, the Eastern church had little vision for reaching out to Persia, India, and other non-evangelized lands (Kuiper, p. 68).

With the fall of Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Carthage to the Muslims, the authority of the Western pope in Rome was further secured. No longer did he have the competition and rivalry of the once powerful patriarchs of these four cities. Furthermore, since the invading barbarians had converted to the Nicene faith through missionaries like Boniface, Augustine, Willibrord, etc., sent from the Western popes, these Germanic tribes came to regard the bishops of Rome with great respect and awe. There was but one more Germanic tribe to conquer, the Arian Lombards who were constantly threatening the Western pope and people until they were subdued by Charlemagne in 777, forty-five years after Charles Martel stopped the invasion of the Muslims into Western Europe. Therefore, just as the northern invasions of the barbarians had strengthened the hand of the Pope in Rome, so did the Islamic invasions from the south by eliminating the influence of the Eastern patriarchs (Kuiper, pp. 73, 76-77).

### ***XVI. The Alliance between the Carolingian Rulers and the Western Church***

We have already made mention of Clovis, the first leader of the Franks who was able to unify the Franks into a united kingdom in what is now modern-day France. Clovis was converted to orthodox Christianity in 496. His conversion provided the means by which Western popes could later appeal to the Frankish kings for help against invading barbarian tribes. Clovis was succeeded by incompetent sons making it necessary for the administration of the Frankish kingdom to be passed on to the Mayors of the Palace, the first of whom was Charles Martel, “The Hammer” who at the Battle of Tours in 732 successfully ended the Islamic quest to conquer

all of Western Europe. Thus, the *Merovingian* dynasty of Clovis' line gave way to the *Carolingian* dynasty which began with Pepin Heristal who ruled the Frankish kingdom as a prime minister (or Mayor of the Palace) from 687 to 714. He was succeeded in 714 by his illegitimate son, *Charles Martel* who ruled the Franks until 741. Charles' son, *Pepin the Short*, was the first Carolingian who actually took the title of King of the Franks, and he ruled as king until 768 (Cairns, pp. 182-183). This information is important for church history because it provides the context for the alliance between Western popes and the Carolingian dynasty of the Franks.

In 554, the Eastern emperor Justinian had been able to regain Italy from the Ostrogoths, but only 14 years later in 568, Italy was under attack from the Arian Lombards. I mentioned earlier that Gregory the Great had negotiated peace with the invading Lombards (p. 38 of your notes). He did this partly by placing the Iron Crown upon the Lombard king, a crown which supposedly contained one of the large iron nails of the cross of Christ. In spite of this gesture, the Lombards were a constant threat to the papacy in Rome, and there was no use expecting any help against them from the emperors in Constantinople who followed Justinian. These emperors were much weaker than Justinian and were busy defending the Eastern portion of the Empire from the barbarian threat. For this reason, the Western pope needed a military champion to protect the Western portion of the empire. He found this champion in the Carolingian dynasty which had succeeded the Merovingian dynasty of Clovis. Even though there had been a change of dynasties, there had not been a change of faith; the Carolingians were still orthodox Christians (Kuiper, pp. 69-70).

The military defeat of the Muslims by Charles Martel in 732 had not gone unnoticed by the Western pope who knew that the real power in the Frankish kingdom was not in the Merovingian line of Clovis but in the Carolingian line of Charles Martel. Remember that the sons of Clovis were incompetent and profligate (immoral). Although *Childeric III*—also known as “Childeric the Stupid” (Gonzalez, p. 234) and the last of the Merovingian line of Clovis—was technically king of Franks, *Pepin the Short*, son of Charles Martel, deposed him and forced him to live in a monastery the rest of his life. Pepin then assumed the role of king, but he also wished to legitimize (legalized and sanction) this regime change by winning the approval of Pope Zacharias of Rome. Recognizing who was really in charge and who had the ability to protect the church against the Lombards, Pope Zacharias was eager to crown Pepin as the legitimate king of the Franks. In exchange for this favor, Zacharias petitioned Pepin for help against the Lombards in Italy, a favor that Pepin discharged by invading Italy in 754 and 756 and redeeming some of Italy away from the Lombards. He then gave the papacy some of the land of central Italy as a reward for his coronation as king. This transaction was known as the *Donation of Pepin* and became the foundation for the papal states held by the papacy in Rome from 756 until 1870 when Italy became a new nation.

Ironically, at about the same time Pepin made his donation of land to the papacy—the middle of the eighth century—a false story was invented and circulated about a donation of land from Emperor Constantine supposedly granted over 400 years earlier. This was called the *Donation of Constantine*. As the story goes, Constantine had been healed miraculously of leprosy by Sylvester, the bishop of Rome, and out of gratitude to him had made a generous grant of land to the papacy. This grant included the city of Rome and all the provinces, districts, and the cities of Italy and of the western part of the empire. Thus, sovereignty over the western half of the empire was granted to the popes by none less than Constantine himself—at least according to this

document (Kuiper, p. 78). In addition, Constantine had supposedly declared that the bishop in Rome was the universal bishop of the whole church, East and West, and that the church in Rome was the supreme church of the empire. He then left Rome and returned to Constantinople to prevent interference in the “imperial rights of the pope”. Using the momentum (growing force) of the Donation of Pepin, the Roman papacy now used this fraudulent (phony) document, the Donation of Constantine, to support and legitimize (make legal) “their claims to temporal possessions [land] and to power in both the temporal and spiritual realms” (Cairns, pp. 183-185).

About 100 years later in the middle of the ninth century, a second document appeared called the “*Isidorian Decretals*” (also known as the *False Decretals*) supposedly consisting of decisions of popes and councils from the time of Clement of Rome in the first century to Gregory II in the eighth century. The document claimed that bishops could appeal directly to the pope in Rome and that popes and bishops were not subordinate to the secular government—that is, to the emperor. The Donation of Constantine was included in the Isidorian Decretals. The significance of these decretals is that they demonstrated proof that the system of ecclesiastical hierarchy claimed by the bishops and popes for the western church was not something which developed gradually over several centuries. Rather, this hierarchy existed in the church from the very beginning; therefore, all the rights and privileges claimed by popes in the *ninth* century had also belonged to the popes from the *early history* of the church. Such was the claim (Kuiper, p. 78).

In 1433 (the 15<sup>th</sup> century), Nicholas de Cusa suggested that the Isidorian Decretals were false (Kuiper, p. 78). Seven years later in 1440, the Donation of Constantine was proven to be a forgery by Lorenzo Valla. Even Catholic scholars now admit that both documents are forgeries. To this day, the Roman Catholic Church in the West is one of the richest land-holders in the world, and the pope considers himself the official spiritual spokesman of the church in the political affairs of nations. Some of his pronouncements have been Biblically correct. For example the Roman Catholic pope has denounced the evils of abortion and the tyranny of communism. However, this mixing of temporal and spiritual power has not always been helpful to the kingdom of God. In Latin America, for example, Catholic priests—who consider the whole of Latin America to be under the Pope’s authority—have often hindered the work of evangelical missionaries. The same has been true in Russia which is dominated by Eastern Orthodoxy. As soon as any church claims temporal domain in a geographical region, it forbids the work of any others using the power of the sword to accomplish its work rather than the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 26: 51-52). We will learn later that Crusades, although to some extent provoked by Muslim aggression, were devastating to the cause of evangelizing the Muslims later on. Protestants have also used the power of the sword—the State—to maintain spiritual power. The Reformers in Europe persecuted the Anabaptists (Leonard Verduin, *Reformers and Their Stepchildren*). Likewise, the Puritans in Massachusetts believed that the civil magistrate was given the responsibility of protecting the true religion. In their estimation, the “true religion” was Puritanism which must be protected against the preaching of Baptist preachers. For this reason any Baptist who was caught preaching within their precincts (regions) were punished by whipping. There is documented proof that two such Baptist preachers were captured and whipped so severely that they had to sleep on their hands and knees for two weeks (Verduin).

Kuiper has noted that, in a sense, the coronation of Pepin the Short by Pope Zacharias was one of the most important events of medieval history. Many years later, the conclusion was made that *the pope had the temporal power to depose kings and to make kings*. Zacharias had sanctioned

the deposing of Childeric and had crowned Pepin the Short king in his place. Therefore, the real power behind the throne was the pope (Kuiper, pp. 70-71). But this was not the prevailing notion (belief) during the Merovingian dynasty under Clovis. Bishop Boniface had complained to Pope Zacharias—before the crowning of Pepin in 751—that the Frankish church was practically ruled by temporal lords and that many of the bishops of the Frankish church acted more the part of temporal lords than as pastors shepherding the flocks. Furthermore, no church council of Frankish bishops had ever been called together to bring spiritual renewal to the church. Even since the time of Clovis the leaders of the church had been content to obey the political rulers who had assumed the privilege of appointing bishops. It was a vicious circle of political rulers appointing bishops who in turn protected their appointments by agreeing to everything the temporal ruler said—otherwise known as “Yes men”. Not until the time of Charlemagne would there be any change of this situation (Gonzalez, p. 234).

Pepin the Short’s reign ended in 768 and was followed by the reign of his two sons, Charles (later known as Charlemagne—“Charles the Great”) and Carloman. Carloman died in 771 leaving Charles as the sole ruler of the Frankish kingdom until 814. *Charlemagne* was an imposing figure, sporting long white hair and towering seven feet tall with a huge body proportionate to his height—bigger than a professional basketball player for the NBA (assuming you have ever seen one). He was the consummate (complete and perfect in every way) warrior, having fought in over 50 military campaigns. From the Frankish kingdom in modern-day France he pushed the boundaries of his dominion into Italy, driving out the Lombards by 777. He then turned his attention to the eastern borders of his empire into Germany and Frisia where he defeated the Saxons and Frisians and “evangelized” them by the edge of the sword, forcing them either to convert to Christianity or die. All of them were, thus, effectively “evangelized” since they believed that their baptism into the Christian faith meant that they had forsaken their former gods. There was, thus, no turning back since their gods had forsaken them in like manner. “Christian” leaders soon arose among the Saxons who adopted Charlemagne’s missionary strategy believing that the edge of the sword was the most effective way of reaching people for the Christian faith (Gonzalez, pp. 267-268).

His kingdom was the second largest of the three kingdoms of the world in his day. The largest of these kingdoms was the Muslim Empire which stretched from the border of India through Persia, Syria, Palestine, into Asia and over Northern Africa up to the Ebro River in Spain (cf. maps in Kuiper, p. 67, and Cairns, p. 174). The Eastern Empire, by comparison, was small and weak having had much of its territory taken away from it by the Muslim conquest of the seventh century from 634-644. It consisted of the Balkans, Asia Minor and southern Italy. Charlemagne’s empire was the youngest, but also the strongest, of the three world empires. At his death it consisted of the northern half of Italy, the entire land mass of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, a large area of Germany and Austria, and the northeast corner of Spain which he recovered from the Muslims (Kuiper, p. 73; cf. map in Cairns, p. 184). Not since the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 had so large an area been under one ruler. He had actually pushed past the original boundaries of the old Western Empire by subjugating the Saxons and Frisians along the eastern borders. He was the greatest ruler between Justinian and Charles V (Kuiper, pp. 73-74; Gonzalez, p. 266).

Charlemagne was not an educated man, himself, but one who was very sympathetic to the need for education. He enjoyed having others read to him and play music for him. He would later attempt to learn the skill of writing in his own palace school; but his massive fingers, so

accustomed to gripping the battle axe, found gripping a pen a hopelessly difficult task (Kuiper, p. 73). This palace school was to have the important contribution of passing on the basic liberal arts curriculum of Roman higher education to the medieval university—the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). He also was a firm believer in an educated church leadership and required the monasteries to establish schools for the interpretation of the Scriptures, relying on the depository of knowledge preserved in the British monasteries (Cairns, pp. 187-188; Gonzalez, p. 268). Schools were also established in churches for the education both the rich and the poor (Gonzalez, p. 268).

As far as his philosophy of church and state went, Charlemagne believed that the church could be compared to the soul of man and the state to the body. The church had one sphere of responsibility and the state another sphere. However, he was not consistent with this ideal. Charlemagne appointed bishops the same way he appointed generals in the army, but they were chosen on the basis of worth, not fraud. He enacted laws making Sunday a day of rest and preaching to be done in the common language of the people. Mandatory (required) tithes were levied like taxes to support the work of the church. Mention was made earlier of Boniface's complaint to Pope Zacharias in 751 about the low spiritual level of the church in the Frankish kingdom (p. 49 of your notes). The Monastic movement, which started out as a reaction to the low spiritual state of the church throughout the empire, both East and West, had itself lost much of its original ambition as a reform movement. The monasteries had become self-sufficient and were often the beneficiaries of huge estates making many of the abbots (heads of monasteries) wealthy and powerful. Charlemagne decided that the whole monastic system was in need of reform, and all of them were then brought back under the Benedictine Rule (Gonzalez, p. 268; cf. pp. 30-31 of your notes).

When it came to ultimate authority, the church and its bishops should submit to the decisions of the emperor. This philosophy was vividly expressed in a dispute between Leo III and another ecclesiastical faction within the church of Rome, a dispute in which Leo was almost murdered. He fled to Charlemagne who then accompanied him back to Rome—no doubt with sufficient military escort to do whatever was necessary to reinstate Leo. A court was held in which Leo was acquitted of all charges—to no one's surprise. On Christmas Day, in 800, Leo reciprocated (returned the favor) by crowning Charlemagne as the emperor of the Roman Empire, the first such emperor since 476. Throughout his reign from 771 to 814, he maintained law and order, encouraged civilization and culture, and promoted Christianity; and he did so during a very dark period of world history when lawlessness and ignorance dominated the world scene (Kuiper, p. 72). With the crowning of Charlemagne, the people of the old Western Roman Empire were reunited in the Empire of Charlemagne. His crowning also ended the hopes of the Eastern emperors of regaining the lands lost to the barbarian tribes in the fifth century. Perhaps even more significantly, in Charlemagne we have a repeat of the coronation of Pepin the Short by Pope Zacharias in 751 and a confirmation of the idea that *kings owed their crowns to the Western pope*. Added to this idea was the belief that the *emperor was obliged to protect the popes from their enemies*. Clovis, king of the Franks, had become a Christian in 496. A little more than 300 years later, his conversion received its ultimate climax in the uniting of the Western Roman Empire under another Frankish king, Charlemagne. From 800 until the year 1054, the complete division of the Eastern and Western church, the main struggle is between the Western pope and the ruler of the Frankish empire (Cairns, p. 188).

Not surprisingly with Charlemagne's emphasis on education, his empire attracted many of the best minds in Europe. However, no original thinker besides *John Scotus Erigena* was produced during this time whose writings were "more Neoplatonic than Christian. However, his tone was so erudite [scholarly], and his speculation so abstract, that not many read his work, fewer understood it, and on one seems to have become his follower" (Gonzalez, p. 270). Theological activity during the Carolingian period concentrated primarily on predestination and the presence of Christ in communion. *Gottschalk*, a monk who had studied Augustine, believed that the church had departed from Augustine's teaching on predestination. In a debate with many distinguished theologians, including John Scotus Erigena, Gottschalk was declared a heretic and imprisoned in a monastery where he is said to have gone mad shortly before his death. *Radbertus*, another monk, stirred up the debate about the presence of Christ in communion in his book, *On the Body and the Blood of the Lord*, in which he argued that the bread and wine in communion are transformed into the actual body and blood of the Lord whenever they are consecrated by the priest. *Ratramnus* of Corbie contradicted this teaching by saying that the body of Christ is present in communion but not physically present. Christ is physically present only at the right hand of God in heaven. Thus, the doctrine of *transubstantiation*—the conversion of the bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ at communion—was not fully developed at this time even though some believed this to be true. Not until the 13<sup>th</sup> century at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) would the church formally declare the doctrine of transubstantiation which is held by the Roman Catholic Church today.

## *XVII. The Decline of Charlemagne's Empire and the Birth of Feudalism*

### *A. The Decline of Charlemagne's Empire*

As so often happens, the sons of a great man do not possess the same abilities as their father. This proved to be true with Charlemagne's son, Louis "the Pious"—who ruled from 814-840—who could not keep control of such a large empire. His intentions were noble, ordering two-thirds of the collected tithes—mandatory (required) under Charlemagne—to be given to the poor. (A better plan than many US churches which give two-thirds of the tithe to buildings and maintenance.) He also continued the reform of the monasteries under the "Rule of Benedict" and returned some control back to the church by allowing the bishops to be elected by the people and the clergy instead of choosing the bishops like his father had done. Powerful people interpreted such benevolence (kindness) as weakness and rebelled against him, plunging the last years of his reign into civil wars. Two of his sons fought each other for power as well as their father, and at Louis' death the impressive empire of Charlemagne was divided among Louis' three sons, Charlemagne's grandsons—Louis, Charles, and Lothair—in the Treaty of Verdun in 843. This treaty gave rise to modern France and Germany (Cairns, p. 187; see the division of Charlemagne's empire in Kuiper, p. 81). The empire was not again to be reunited under a single rule until Otto unified Germany in 962 and became the first ruler of the Holy Roman Empire.

The barbarian tribes which had been subdued by Charlemagne did not take long to seize this new opportunity to invade the divided empire. The strong man was now gone; the empire splintered; and there was no centralized government or army to defend effectively against invading armies. During the 8<sup>th</sup> century (700-800), while Charlemagne was carving out his empire, the Scandinavians of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway had been busy developing the art of shipbuilding. They now used their navy (70 foot ships carrying 80 men each) to invade Europe from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cairns, p. 194; Gonzalez, p. 272). They were called Norsemen,

or Northmen. They are also known today as the Vikings. They first began plundering the northern coast of France and Britain invading churches, monasteries, and palaces, returning once again to the North with their stolen loot and slaves. As time went by, and discovering that Europe was a fat hen easily plucked, the Norsemen made invasions further and further into European soil and ended up settling in their conquered domains.

By the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Danish king, Canute, had conquered England as well as his homeland of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. As early as 845 the Norsemen had conquered Bordeaux, Nantes, and Paris, France—and this only 45 years after Charlemagne was crowned king of the restored Western Empire. The Vikings presented problems for the Christians and Muslims of Spain and eventually took Sicily away from the Muslims. They also settled in southern Italy and northern France which was later called Normandy after the “Normans”. From northern France they would attack the parts of England that had not already come under their control. William, Duke of Normandy (William the Conqueror) would subdue England at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 (Kuiper, p. 83).

***As the Scandinavians were conquering Europe and destroying churches, they themselves were being conquered—by the Christian faith.*** The same pattern which had prevailed during the barbarian invasions of the Western Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries also prevailed from the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Immersed in idolatry and suffering under the bondage of their own heathen gods, the Scandinavians eventually adopted the Christian faith of their conquered hosts, discovering that Christ’s yoke was easy and His burden light by comparison. By the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, virtually all the Norsemen had been baptized. Of course, their “conversion” was much like the conversion of so many of the barbarians of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, mass conversions following those of their kings and military leaders (Gonzalez, pp. 272-273). Many were converted at the point of a sword. Nevertheless, many people genuinely came to the Christian faith and history was repeating itself. Western Europe was lost again to the invading barbarians only to have the barbarians conquered by a different sword—the sword of the Spirit.

While the Scandinavians were invading from the north, the Magyars were invading from the east. Those who were living in Western Europe called them “Hungarians” because the Magyars reminded them of the Huns. After settling in what is now Hungary, the Magyars invaded Germany and southern Italy until they were stopped by Henry the Fowler and his son, Otto I of Germany. Missionaries went to Hungary from Germany and also from the Byzantine Empire which continued to stand against the Muslim invasions. Finally the king of Hungary converted to the Christian faith and his successor (the king who came after him), Stephen, forced the conversion of all Hungary (Gonzalez, pp. 273-274). Evangelism is much more efficient with the steel sword than the sword of the Spirit, but the resulting fruit leaves much to be desired.

### ***B. The Birth of Feudalism***

The Islamic invasions of the seventh century had essentially cut off much of the trade along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and into the Orient (Asia) forcing each geographical area to become more dependent upon the land and less dependent on outside trade. City life diminished as people returned to the land to make a living. Money, the normal medium of exchange, almost ceased to circulate and gold coins became rare. Land took the place of money as the main source of wealth and was used by kings and lords to



pay for services. Thus, *feudalism* developed as an hierarchical system in which those who received lands (*vassals*) from wealthier people (*lords*) were willing to discharge certain obligations to this lord—e.g. military service and the protection of the lord’s domains. Such land owners who provided military protection for greater lords were also known as *feudal knights* (Cairns, p. 192). These vassals, in turn, were willing to grant lands (called *fiefs* or *manors*) to less wealthy people or lesser vassals who would discharge certain services to this lesser lord, and so on down the line. Thus, a person could be a lord and a vassal at the same time. People who owned no land at all—by far the majority—were called *serfs*, the foundation of the feudal economy, the people who actually worked for a living! In order to give some credit to the knights, the knights and their armies were the ones who protected the serfs on their lands. Thus, the feudal arrangement was mutually beneficial.

Since the empire was now divided, the political leaders who came after Charlemagne were not powerful enough to protect themselves against invasions. To compensate for this weakness, feudalism provided these leaders with armies which were obligated to fight for the lords who bestowed land to them (Gonzalez, p. 269; Kuiper, p. 81).

Lands were first granted to vassals for life, but later became hereditary—granted to the vassal’s children, grandchildren, etc. Vassals also held land under different lords which became complicated when two different lords requested military service from the same vassal. The end result was “the political and economic fragmentation” (breaking into pieces) of Western Europe and the *decentralization of power* (Gonzalez, p. 269). There was no strong central government which had existed under Charlemagne. Instead, Europe was divided up into small principalities ruled by nobles (lords who were not also vassals) who had the power of kings in their own lands. Sometimes people granted large tracts of land to monasteries or churches as works of merit “earning” salvation, making bishops and abbots (heads of monasteries) very wealthy people who were courted by kings and princes for their political support (Kuiper, pp. 82-83; Gonzalez, p. 269). Thus, the question of who had the authority to appoint bishops and abbots to their positions became very important since they were in control of much land—which meant much wealth and power available to accomplish their political goals (Gonzalez, p. 269). Whoever owned large amounts of land were able to raise armies, and this sometimes included the bishops and abbots who themselves raised armies for various causes. This feudalization also presented the problem of divided loyalties. When a bishop or abbot was protected by a feudal knight, was he more obligated to the knight or to the pope (Cairns, p. 194)?

The church was further secularized (turned from religious interests to material and political interests) since nobles often wished to grant their sons and grandsons religious positions. The reason for this ambition had nothing to do with spiritual interests. The feudal lord (noble) was not interested in the religious influence his children and grandchildren could offer to the church. Rather, bishops and abbots controlled large amounts of land and wealth which translated into more political power for the noble and his family (Cairns, p. 194).

The feudal lords in Italy continually fought one another for control of Rome and the privilege of appointing the pope. Technically, the pope was elected by the clergy and the people of the city, but in actual practice whoever controlled the city controlled the clergy and the general population. Very ungodly men were often elected as popes, especially in the 10<sup>th</sup> century—the lowest point of the western church. Whenever one noble gained control of Rome, he would depose (remove) the pope appointed by the previous noble. In such manner, one pope followed

another in rapid succession from 891 to 955 during which period there were no less than 20 different popes (Kuiper, p. 84). The crowning of Charlemagne as emperor in 800 by Pope Leo III had given the pope tremendous prestige throughout the world as one who could make kings and depose kings. Ironically, Rome itself lay in political chaos with one noble family after another attempting to gain control of the city and the church. The office of pope was prize to be won at all costs, even if the cost was bribery, deceit, or murder (Gonzalez, p. 274).

As Charlemagne's empire declined under his son and grandsons, the papacy once again emerged as the only source of universal authority. History was repeating itself once again as in the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century from 411 to 476. The pendulum of authority in Western Europe seems to have swung back and forth between strong political leaders and strong popes. In the absence of a strong political leader like Charlemagne, the pope's authority became the only anchor for civilization. On the other hand, the presence of a strong king like Charlemagne rendered the pope's authority less needed. Sometimes of course, the alliances between king and pope were strong, as in the case of Leo III when his life was threatened in Rome and he was rescued by Charlemagne (see notes above on Charlemagne). The most outstanding pope since the time of Gregory the Great (from 590-604) was Nicholas I who served as pope from 858-867. It was during his time as pope that the *False Decretals* (see above) were circulated throughout Europe claiming that popes were not subordinate (do not need to submit) to secular powers, including emperors. Since these false documents were assumed to be genuine, they gave Nicholas I a great deal of leverage (power) in curbing the warring factions of Europe who seemed to engage in war as a sport, leaving thousands of common soldiers and agricultural serfs dead or suffering in their wake (any action which leaves consequences). Thus, God in His infinite wisdom used a false document to bring relief to the suffering masses. Following in the footsteps of John the Baptist, Nicholas also rebuked the king of Loraine for marital sins. The next pope, Hadrian II, clashed with the same ruler, Lothair II, and cursed him and his court when the wayward, unrepentant king showed up for communion. An epidemic broke out in the king's court thereafter leaving Lothair dead. In such manner was the pope's authority and prestige "royally" enhanced.

### ***XVIII. The Dark Days of the Papacy***

As we have seen, the integrity of the papacy had already been compromised with political interests as far back as the middle of the eighth century when Pepin the Short was crowned king of the Franks by Pope Zacharias. Cairns marks this event as the beginning of the pope's claim to temporal authority, distinct from spiritual authority (p. 195). This tradition continued with Charlemagne, Pepin's descendent, almost 50 years later in 800 when he was crowned emperor of the restored Roman Empire. Nicholas I (see above) used the momentum of the Isidorian Decretals (False Decretals) to claim immunity from the authority of temporal rulers, but used this authority in some helpful ways as noted.

We have seen that the papacy (the office of pope along with many other appointments) became a prize to be won at any cost including bribery, deceit, and murder, illustrated below in gruesome detail. Part of the reason for this was that the papacy and many high level positions in the church had become economically and politically powerful due to the acquisition (acquiring) of lands and wealth in a feudalistic society. Large tracts of land and wealth were donated to the church and to monasteries by generous patrons (donors), some of whom were attempting to atone for their sins on earth and ensure a path to heaven. Control of the church, therefore, meant control of vast

wealth. “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Lord Acton) and “the love of money is the root of all evil”. (We can almost picture the Apostle Paul shaking his head in disgust—1 Tim. 3: 8; 6: 5).

Serious trouble in the papacy developed during the papacy of John VIII before 887 who was poisoned, and when he was too slow in dying was clubbed to death in his own palace. Thus began a series of homicides (murders) in which popes were strangled by hired assassins or starved to death in dungeons by their successors (popes who came after them). Sometimes there were two or three popes at one time supported by two or three different factions in Rome, each one claiming to be the true successor to Peter. Mention has been made of the rival families in Italy who fought one another to gain control of the papacy. In 904, Sergius III had two of his rivals put in prison and killed with the help of one of the more powerful families in Italy headed by Theophylact and his wife Theodora. Their daughter, Marozia, was Sergius’ mistress. After Sergius died, Marozia and her husband, Guido of Tuscia, seized the palace of Pope John X, put him in prison and later suffocated him to death with a pillow. After the brief pontificates (office of the pope) of Leo VI and Stephen VII, Marozia placed John XI on the papal throne, her illegitimate son by Sergius III.

Thirty years later in 955, Marozia’s grandson, John XII, became pope, serving from 955-963 (Gonzalez, pp. 275; Kuiper, p. 84; Houghton, p. 51). John XII proved to be a “chip off the old block” of his wicked grandmother and was judged by a Roman synod (a council of church officials) as a thoroughly degraded and profligate (immoral) man. He was charged by this council with various crimes including drinking to the devil’s health and invoking (calling upon) the help of heathen gods and demons as he threw dice. To these charges he replied to the synod, “If you wish to set up another pope, by Almighty God I excommunicate you, so that you will not have power to perform mass or to ordain anyone” (Houghton, p. 51).

John XII was able to remain in power with the help of Otto I, king of the Germans. The unification of the Germans was much more difficult than in France because of the vast differences in geography (Cairns, p. 197). However, Otto had been able to subdue (conquer) the independent dukes (nobles) of Germany with the help of powerful abbots and bishops who held vast holdings of land. Because of their wealth, the German bishops and abbots were able to raise armies which, when combined with the armies of Otto I, were able to defeat all the independent dukes of Germany. Otto maintained his power in the same way he seized power in the first place, through political cooperation with bishops. He appointed bishops in the church who would support his rule, and for this favor the bishops would receive his loyalty and protection, the same thing which happened with Leo I whom Charlemagne protected from a murderous faction in Rome (cf. notes above). This is called *lay investiture*, the appointment of bishops by a *lay* ruler, a political ruler who was not a member of the clergy. Of course, Otto would only appoint abbots and bishops whom he would expect to remain loyal to him. Thus, once again we see the bishops and abbots of another country becoming political rulers more than shepherds of the sheep, and this condition continued until the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. Remember that the kingdom of the Franks under Clovis and subsequent Frankish rulers was plagued with this same lay investiture and mixture of political interest.

For Otto’s help in keeping him on the papal throne, John XII crowned him emperor of the *Holy Roman Empire* in 962. This was the rebirth of the old Western Roman Empire which had been divided under the weak successors of Charlemagne after 814. Remember that the Western

Empire had fallen in 476 under the onslaught of the barbarian invasions. It had been restored to its former glory by the powerful military campaigns of Charlemagne from 771 to 814. The empire then fell into disrepair under Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious, and his three grandsons who fought one another for power resulting in the division of the empire into three parts after 843. In 962, under Otto I, the empire is once again united under one temporal (secular) ruler and was called the Holy Roman Empire. By calling upon a German ruler to help him, John XII started a new tradition in the papacy in which men would be chosen who were not Italians (Kuiper, pp. 84-85).

Continuing with our story of murder and deceit, Marozia's nephew became Pope John XIII. Benedict VI, successor to John XIII, was strangled to death by John XIII's brother, Crescentius, also a nephew of "you know who"—Marozia! (Gonzalez, p. 275) Thus, Marozia and family represented the quintessential (perfect form) "power brokers" of the papal throne during the Middle Ages. John XIV was strangled to death by Boniface VII in 974. (Gonzalez believes Boniface poisoned him or starved him to death in a dungeon.) Boniface himself was later poisoned and was described by a synod of the church as "a papal monster who in his abject [lowest] depravity exceeds all mortals" (Houghton, p. 51). All of the men mentioned above were the *popes* of the church, not the average members; and one can only imagine the average level of Christianity practiced during this time when the people were being led by such despicable and degraded men. Voltaire, a pagan French philosopher, once quipped (joked) that the Holy Roman Empire was neither "holy", nor "Roman", nor an "empire" (Cairns, p. 187). Regretfully, he was right, but Voltaire had no understanding of who God was and that He was not dependent upon this corrupt institutional church but was working behind the scenes in the hearts of true believers, the invisible church, a quiet, secret reformation of the church which had nothing to do with institutional politics. We will explore this later on.

This legacy of corruption and death continued through the pontificate (papacy) of Pope Sylvester III who was placed in power by the Crescentius family—relatives of Marozia! They were able to remove Benedict IX from the papal throne in 1045 and replace him with Sylvester III. With the help of the rival Tuscan family, Benedict was able to regain his position but soon grew tired of it and sold it to another cleric for 1000 pounds of silver who became Gregory VI (Kuiper, p. 85). It turns out that Gregory VI actually wanted to reform the church (Gonzalez, p. 276), but considered buying the office a necessary means to this end. This is known as the error of "the end justifying the means". In other words, it does not matter how you do something as long as you get good results. Gregory was a good man who won the admiration and following of the saintly Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII). (Hildebrand was the point man or leader for reform in the church for more than thirty years.) But this was the same error which incited (caused) other godless men to strangle, poison, and starve their opponents to death in order to seize the office of pope. The end *does not* justify the means.

Because of a strong popular reaction against selling the sacred office for money—a practice called *simony* (cf. Acts 8: 18-24)—Benedict changed his mind and refused to step down as pope resulting in *three* popes being in office at the same time—Sylvester III, Benedict IX, and Gregory VI (Kuiper, p. 85). Henry III, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and favorable to reform, stepped in and called the synod of Sutri in 1046 in which all three popes were deposed and the practice of simony condemned. Gonzalez maintains that Gregory stepped down voluntarily "for the sake of peace and unity" after a private interview with Henry III (p. 276), while Cairns and Kuiper support the theory that Gregory was forced by the synod to resign

(Cairns, p. 202; Kuiper, p. 97). If Gregory VI was the man Gonzalez reports him to be, it is likely he did step down voluntarily for the good of the church. (History is not an exact science, and different historians approach the evidence from different angles and sometimes come up with different conclusions.) At the end of the controversy Clement II was named as the new pope but died soon afterward. He was followed by another pope who also shortly died. (Historically, many of the popes were already old men when they came to the throne.) Henry III then offered the papacy to his cousin Bruno, bishop of Toul who was already well-known as a zealous reformer of the church (Gonzalez, p. 276; Cairns, p. 202). Ironically, the same man—Bruno, bishop of Toul, who wanted to reform the church along with two others, Hildebrand and Humbert—came to the office through *nepotism*, the practice of giving offices to one's relatives. However, in Bruno's defense, it was a foregone (previously determined) conclusion that he was the natural choice for the job, and his entrance into Rome to accept this office was attended by thousands of admirers (see below).

This is the kind of story that American movies are made of, and for about 150 years the papacy resembled the Italian mafia (organized crime families) more than shepherds of the church for which Christ died. For skeptics and nominal Christians, the papacy was the object of scorn and the subject of jesting (making jokes); for the faithful few, it was the object of mourning. Something had to change. That change would come with the reforming zeal of Bruno, Hildebrand, and Humbert.

### ***XIX. Monastic Reform—the Cluny Monasteries***

God *never leaves Himself without a witness* at any time in the history of the church. Elijah also thought he was all alone in his fight against Jezebel and the prophets of Baal, but God had reserved for Himself 7000 people who had remained faithful to the covenant (1 Kings 19: 18). And so it was in this very dark period of church history. The hierarchy of the church had been corrupted by money and political power—these two things go hand in hand—but there were still faithful priests, monks, and common members of the church who knew and practiced the truth. We should not conclude that corruption was the only thing going on in the church at this time. Church history is sketchy (has many unrecorded gaps) because we have much documentation (historical records) of corruption in the hierarchy while the common lives of faithful priests, monks, and ordinary Christians were seldom if ever recorded. The history of the church, like secular history, is the history of famous men, women, and major movements. There were faithful Christians living during this time who were never public figures and who never became famous, but God used these unknown heroes of the faith to preserve His church.

The story of Bruno, Hildebrand, and Humbert goes back long before 1048 and the appointment of Bruno as Pope Gregory VII. The very idea of the papacy being for sale to the rich and powerful was scandalous and shameful to faithful Christians throughout Europe. If you will remember, there were many in the church during the reign of Constantine who bemoaned (mourned) the formalization and nominalization of the church. Thousands were pouring into the church who neither understood the Christian faith nor cared to understand it. They were there to ride the wave of preferential (preferred) treatment from Emperor Constantine. As a protest to this formalization, the monastic movement was born, beginning with the solitary monks in the Eastern portion of the church and taking its final form in the communal monasteries in the West. Likewise, during the dark days of the papacy from about 890 to 1050, many of the faithful were turning once again to the monastic ideal. “Thus, it was out of the monasteries that a wave of

reform arose that conquered the papacy, clashed with the powerful, and was felt even in the distant shores of the Holy Land” (Gonzalez, p. 277).

But something needed to be done to the monasteries before this happened. As noted earlier, even the monasteries needed reform. Like the papacy, they had become the objects of greed because of vast land holdings and the political power which came with them. Half of the land and wealth in France and Germany was controlled by bishops and abbots. The Rule of Benedict requiring obedience and a simple life of prayer, scripture reading and manual labor was ignored for the most part. Many abbots (heads of monasteries) bought their posts with the help of powerful families, the same practice as those attempting to buy the papacy. Many priests and abbots could not even read or write. Some even murdered to obtain their posts. Being the head of a monastery could be a “cushy” job (a life of ease) as long as you lived in areas protected from the invading Norsemen who regularly robbed monasteries as thieves now rob banks. And sometimes the monasteries resembled banks with chapels decorated with gold and jewels (Gonzalez, pp. 277-278, 280; Houghton, p. 51)). The abbot, who was supposed to be celibate, didn’t even have to abstain from sex since there were many willing mistresses around who were happy to exchange sex for the security afforded by a wealthy monk, particularly an abbot (the head of a monastery). The bishops and abbots of this period were notorious (famous in a bad way) for fathering illegitimate children who had the run of the palace or monastery.

In 909, almost at the beginning of the corruption and homicide which plagued the papacy for another 150 years, a small monastery was founded by **Duke William III in Cluny**, his favorite hunting ground. The monastery was deeded to Saints Peter and Paul, insuring it against any seizure by corrupt bishops or even by the pope himself. William called upon **Berno**, a conscientious (sincere) monk who followed the Rule of Benedict to be the abbot (head) of this monastery, a post he served until his death in 926. Cluny became the center of monastic reform for 200 years until 1109, being ruled by only six dedicated abbots in succession, each of whom lived to old age. Cluny became the base of operations by which 1100 other monasteries in every country of Western Europe were also reformed and the Rule of Benedict practiced—with the exception that manual labor was replaced by longer hours of prayer and scripture reading. Keep in mind that while this reform movement was going on, corruption in the church was continuing at the same time, but at least the “sheep” could see a definite contrast between good and evil (Cairns, p. 201; Gonzalez, pp. 278-279; Kuiper, pp. 95-97).

The *ecclesiastical* reform of the church, which began in 1048, *eventually emerged from the monastic reform of the Cluny monasteries* spanning some 200 years from 900 to 1100. The Cluniac movement was successful, to a large measure, because it was *independent of civil powers*. This, in turn was the dream of ecclesiastical reformers—Bruno, Hildebrand, Humbert—and their followers who wanted church leaders who were *not obligated to kings or nobles for their positions*. As stated earlier, it is ironic that Bruno received his appointment from his cousin, Henry III, the Holy Roman Emperor. So how could he be consistent in taking this appointment while at the same time opposing *simony*—the buying and selling of church offices—and the interference of emperors in the affairs of the church—called lay investiture? Bruno was not blind to this dilemma (problem), and he had been warned by his trusted friend, Hildebrand, that if he simply took the papacy from the emperor it would mean that he was accepting the position “not as an apostle, but as an apostate”. Bruno therefore purposed to accept the papacy only with the public affirmation (approval) of other priests and the people of the Holy Roman Empire. Rather than enter Rome with much pomp, wealth, and political power, he chose

instead to enter the city as a barefooted pilgrim. As he made his way to Rome across northern Italy, thousands of people waited for him along the roads and cheered him as he went by, and indication that the masses supported the reform measures Bruno championed. Stories of miracles attending his pilgrimage began to circulate widely (Gonzalez, p. 283). Bruno accepted the papacy from the emperor, but he had also made an important statement on the way to Rome. While *officially* receiving the papacy from Henry III, his actual *confirmation* as pope had not come from the emperor, but from the clergy and the people. This clerical and popular affirmation represented his ultimate goal of removing the papacy from the control of secular rulers.

One of the worst enemies Bruno faced was *simony*—the buying and selling of church offices. The appointment of bishops and abbots by kings, nobles, and emperors was not strictly simony, but was nevertheless a “close relative” (similar) to simony which had to be stopped. The other great offense—according to the reformers—was *clerical marriage*. Celibacy had been practiced by the clergy for centuries, but it had never been an absolute rule except for monks and nuns. Although the requirement of celibacy is unbiblical, we can understand why the reformers considered it as one of the great evils of the church. In a feudal society social mobility was almost impossible. A person would pretty much occupy the same social standing in life as his father without the possibility of occupying any higher social position (upward mobility). If your father was a wealthy lord or noble, you became a lord as well; but if your father was a poor serf who owned no land, this would also be your status in life (Gonzalez, pp. 280, 283).

This immobility did not apply to the church which was one of the few institutions which allowed social mobility. Ideally, if a poor man was able to acquire an education and demonstrated ability, he might be able to become a priest, or he could enter a life of study as a monk. Hildebrand, himself was the son of a carpenter (Houghton, p. 51). However, this upward mobility was threatened by the practice of simony in which the rich could purchase ecclesiastical offices with money or land while common people would have no opportunity of holding office because of poverty. If the practice of simony was *combined* with clerical marriage, those who bought their offices could also afford to purchase these same offices *for their children*. In this way, no one but the rich and powerful would ever have the opportunity being appointed on the basis of personal piety (godliness) and diligent study. This is precisely why so many priests and abbots were illiterate and lazy. The only qualification for office was the purchase price, and no one had to prove his ability for the office (Gonzalez, p. 283). Thus, the unbiblical hierarchy of the church, and the power promised by high positions, was the occasion for condemning the marriage of priests. Unbiblical practices will often cause us to make other illicit (incorrect) rules to “correct” those practices.

Another “plank” in the reformers’ platform for renewal was *strict obedience*. As common monks were obedient to the abbot, the entire church must be brought under strict obedience to the pope who must lead the church by his example of reform.

It was the last rule of *selective poverty* which proved the undoing of the Cluniac reform. While the *monk* should live a simple life of poverty, the *monastery* could own vast properties of land and other wealth bequeathed (given) by generous donors who either heartily endorsed monastic reform or wished to earn their salvation. With all the lands being accumulated by Cluny monasteries—which numbered in the hundreds—and under the control of the abbots, it was impossible for abbots to avoid being the objects of bribery and political intrigue. An abbot was a

good ally for any noble or king to have, for one can purchase an army with enough money. ***The accumulation of wealth invited the practice of buying and selling ecclesiastical posts and hindered the reformation of the church.*** Eventually, even the Cluny monasteries fell into spiritual ruin and the Benedictine ideal and desire for reform was lost (Gonzalez, pp. 280-281).

It would, indeed, be difficult to overestimate the damage that the love of money and the misuse of money has done to the church throughout its history and down to the present day. Even today in Africa there is bickering and infighting among pastors over the question of who will receive a portion of Western money being sent to African churches from the US. Western Christians giving the money are not guiltless, but bear the responsibility of being wise or unwise in the distribution and donation of funds. Rather than “throwing money” at many difficult problems, as well as superb opportunities, Western Christians should be consulting mission agencies, missiologists, and even the humble, insignificant missionary—for I write as one—in the proper methods of giving lest they create more problems than they solve. Indeed, Western money has often created, and is creating, more problems than it solves (cf. Roland Allan, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul’s or Ours*). Doubtless there were many wealthy people in Europe who were enthusiastic about the reforms taking place in the Cluny monasteries, but their zeal and generosity was not matched by their intelligence. As a result, the Cluny monasteries “grew fat and kicked” (Deut. 32: 15) and became ineffective and irrelevant for reform. “If we fail to learn the mistakes of history”, one wise person has said, “we are doomed to repeat them.”

But late in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, another monastic movement—the ***Cistercian*** reform—replaced the Cluniac movement for the purpose of reforming the church. (If we become ineffective and irrelevant for God’s purposes of renewal and the propagation of the gospel, He will simply go around us or over us and find another willing, more effective instrument to replace us. God will not be frustrated or hindered by our disobedience. He will use us if we submit to Him, but He will never be dependent upon us. Therefore, if you, the reader, ever get the false impression that there is no one else to do the work of the ministry you are doing and that God ***needs*** you, then prepare yourself to be replaced for this is exactly what will happen until you are ready to cooperate with your sovereign master—not as an equal, but as a humble slave.)

The eventual leader of the Cistercian monastery was ***Bernard of Clairvaux*** (pronounced “clairvo”) who came to the monastery at 23 years of age in 1112 or 1113. He was a mystic who meditated constantly on the love of God and the true humanity of Christ. He became a powerful and eloquent preacher, eventually emerging as an arbitrator (a decision-maker) in many political and ecclesiastical controversies. From this responsibility he eventually would become the power behind the papacy, particularly when one of his monks became the pope (Gonzalez, p. 282).

## ***XX. Ecclesiastical Reform—the Papacies of Bruno and Hildebrand***

Returning once again to our three intrepid (fearless) reformers—Bruno, Hildebrand, and Humbert—we will now trace the history of the reform movement which took place ***in the church*** from 1048. Thus far, we have seen that the Cluny reform was primarily a reform within the ***monasteries*** which eventually spread from the monasteries to the church. While the abuse of power, murder, and deception were occurring in the church, zeal for reform was gaining momentum among many priests, nobles, and the common people. Even before the Cluny movement began, Duke William had been brought under the influence of reforming elements within the monastic movement, influence which had encouraged him to build the monastery at



Cluny and select Berno to be its abbot (see above). But beginning with the Cluny monastery, and with the multiplication of its reforming zeal in 1100 other monasteries, the reform movement gained the momentum it needed to bring change to the church hierarchy. (Church hierarchies are the most difficult institutions to change for they are often immersed in hundreds of years of “the tradition of men” [Mk. 7: 8-9] in opposition to the word of God.)

The main measures of reform were the following: **(1)** the discontinuation of simony—the buying and selling of church offices, **(2)** the discontinuation of the appointment of bishops and abbots by temporal (secular) rulers which rendered (made) these bishops and abbots dependent upon these rulers and disinterested in the spiritual concerns of the church, **(3)** the discontinuation of marriage among the clergy which, combined with simony, kept church offices in the hands of the rich and powerful who would simply purchase church offices for their descendents, and **(4)** strict obedience to the pope, assuming the pope was in agreement with the other three reform measures above.

With these measures in mind and heart, Bruno, Hildebrand, and Humbert made their way to Rome where Bruno was crowned by Henry III as Pope Leo IX. (Popes were always given names different from their real names. You will notice that many of the names—like Leo or Gregory—are repetitive of the names of *former* popes possibly with the purpose of demonstrating an “unbroken line of succession” back to the Apostle Peter.) Bruno, or Leo IX, was crowned pope in 1048. We are now going backwards in time *before* the Cluny movement became corrupt and useless. At this point it was still operating as a dynamic force for change in the Western church. (You may be asking yourself, “What was happening in the Eastern church?” We will get to this question later. The Eastern church broke off from the Western church completely in 1054.)

You may remember that Gregory VI bought the papal office from Boniface IX, a corrupt pope, for the price of 1000 pounds of silver to wrest the papacy out of his hands. This resulted in three popes on one throne at the same time (see notes above). Henry III, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, called the council of Sutri in 1046 and deposed all three popes, selecting Clement II as the new pope who died only two years later. Very soon after this council, Gregory VI, already an old man, left Rome and went into exile; but he took Hildebrand along with him because he was of the same reform persuasion as Gregory. As the story goes, Hildebrand was with Gregory when he died shortly after leaving Rome. Only two years later in 1048, Henry III offered the papacy to Bruno who then summoned Hildebrand to his side to help him in the task of reforming the church. We are now back to the story of Bruno and company making their way to Rome barefooted and being cheered along the way by thousands of people who were also hoping for the reformation of the church—particularly the deliverance of the church from the control of the rich and powerful (Gonzalez, pp. 283-284).

Bruno (Pope Leo IX) served from 1049 to 1054. One of his first actions as pope was to “shake up” the *College of Cardinals*. From the earliest of times the College of Cardinals had existed as a group of bishops who were personal assistants to the pope and wielded much influence over him—the equivalent of a cabinet to a standing president or prime minister. Leo discovered that this college was made up *entirely of Italians representing the powerful noble families which had dominated and degraded the papacy for over a hundred years* (see notes above). These cardinal bishops were not in any sense sympathetic with the Cluny movement for the obvious reason that the movement would remove much of their influence as well as the illegitimate income they received from “power brokering” the papacy in cooperation with powerful Italian

nobles. Leo removed the existing cardinals and replaced them with men who endorsed the Cluny reforms. This was a bold move and fraught (filled) with much danger. Most of these cardinals were unprincipled men who would stop at nothing to get what they wanted. The new cardinals were chosen from *many parts* of the church throughout Western Europe thus breaking the *Italian domination* of the papacy and also representing not only the church in Rome but all the churches throughout Europe.

Bruno, or Leo IX, traveled throughout France and Germany promoting reform and enforcing the authority of the papacy. Remember that one of the measures of the reform movement was *strict obedience to the reforming pope*. Leo also insisted that no church office of any kind would be granted without being chosen by the clergy and the people. This was the reforming principle designed to end all lay investiture and simony. In all his efforts he was aided by Hugo, the abbot of Cluny who was in charge of hundreds of monasteries throughout Europe; thus, before the Cluny monasteries were corrupted in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, they stood side by side with the reforming popes beginning with Leo in 1049 (Kuiper, p. 97).

We must make note of two big mistakes Leo made. Perhaps remembering the valiant stand of Leo I against Attila the Hun in 453, a stand which saved the city of Rome, Leo IX marched at the head of the army against the Norsemen who had settled in Sicily and southern Italy. This was yet another illustration of the confusion of roles common in the Middle Ages. What was the pope doing leading an army? This was not his proper role. The army was defeated and Leo captured, remaining as a prisoner almost to his death. The second great mistake was sending Humbert to Constantinople as his personal representative. Humbert was too disinterested in the concerns of the Eastern church which led to the final schism between the Eastern church and the Western church in 1054 just after Leo's death (Gonzalez, p. 285).

Following Leo's death the papacy was given to a German, Victor II, to prevent the papacy from being taken hostage by powerful Roman families in Italy. He continued Leo's reform policies and when the emperor, Henry III, died Victor was entrusted with the care of the emperor's son, Henry IV. Thus, for a short time the pope had the power of both the papacy and the emperor; and since he was also committed to the reform agenda, the reformation of the church was rapid during his reign and also the reign of several reforming popes after him.

In 1059, during the papacy of Nicholas II and under the influence of Hildebrand and Humbert, the *Second Lateran Council* was called which would decide the manner in which popes would be chosen. It was decided in this council that the College of Cardinals (made up of bishops) would elect a new pope, and that this election would be subject to the approval of the rest of the cardinals in the church and the Roman people. This ruling effectively eliminated the influence of emperors and the Italian nobles in the selection of the pope, one of the goals of the reform movement from the beginning. It also laid the groundwork for the escalating (rising) power of the pope in later history. From the time of Leo IX (Bruno), the cardinals had been men who were committed to the reformation of the church (defined in terms of the reform measures given above—the discontinuation of simony, lay investiture by rulers, and clerical marriage, and the promotion of strict papal authority). Alexander II was chosen as the new pope who continued reforming the church (Gonzalez, p. 285; Cairns, p. 211; Kuiper, pp.102-103).

Upon the death of Alexander in 1073, Hildebrand became Pope Gregory VII. For 24 years and during the administrations of six different popes Hildebrand had influenced papal policy

although never occupying the throne himself until 1073. His influence began under the papacy of Leo IX (whom he accompanied to Rome in 1048) who allowed him to fill important positions in his administration (Cairns, p. 211). This fact should lead us to believe that he was not so much interested in having the papacy for himself as he was the genuine reform of the church under any good pope whom God would choose. He was already popular with the masses and while conducting the funeral of Alexander II, the crowd of people attending the funeral spontaneously and unexpectedly proclaimed him to be the new pope (Kuiper, pp. 104-105). This popular affirmation was a repetition of the popular support of Bruno in 1049 as he made his way to Rome barefoot with thousands of admirers cheering him as he went. The cardinals, who were first supposed to select the pope and then submit their decision to other cardinals and to the people, were compelled by popular consent to install Hildebrand as pope *before* making their selection. To do otherwise would have been to invite chaos and possible revolt. His election was later made legal by the cardinals who voted him in according to the prescribed protocol (method) of the Synod of 1059 under Nicholas II (Kuiper, p. 105).

With Hildebrand on the papal throne, the reform measures he had helped to formalize and implement for the last 24 years were supposed to reach a new zenith (high point). His ideal was that of a “theocracy” in which the Roman Catholic Pope would exercise not only the spiritual power of a religious leader, but the temporal power of a secular ruler operating as the vice-regent of God on earth. The whole world would be “as one flock under one shepherd”. *Thus, Gregory was not satisfied with the church being free from the control of the state; he would only be satisfied if the state were now brought under the control of the church—and specifically, the pope* (Kuiper, p. 107). Gregory’s goal also included the reuniting the Eastern church with the Western church as well as reclaiming all the lands lost to the Muslim invasions. Had he lived long enough, he would have been the instigator of the crusades rather than Urban II (Gonzalez, p. 286).

Among the letters of Hildebrand found after his death was the *Dictatus Papae* in which he outlined some of his beliefs, some of which must have been inspired by his careful study of Augustine’s *The City of God*, a book which described the kingdom of God on earth (Kuiper, p. 108). In that document, Hildebrand argued for the *universal power of the Roman pope* whose authority was the only universal authority other than God whom he represented. *Second*, he argued that temporal rulers and princes were *under his authority* and that he had the power to *release* a ruler’s subjects from any obedience to him if he violated his allegiance to the pope. This belief was soon to be challenged by his controversy with Henry IV, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He also alleged (presented as truth) that the Roman Catholic Church had *never been in error* nor would it ever be in error. Thus, it is clear from his claims to temporal authority over rulers that the fiercest challenge to his papacy would not be clerical marriage or simony, but lay investiture, the selection of bishops and abbots by temporal rulers who thought of themselves in the same lofty terms as Hildebrand.

However, his campaign against clerical marriage also ran into trouble in France. There were many members of the lower clergy (priests but not bishops) who did not like the practice of simony but who were also married. *Gregory called upon all married clergy to divorce their wives and become celibate*, something they refused to do—and good for them! Consequently, the French clergy allied themselves to Philip I of France against Gregory VII effectively halting much of the reform measures in France where simony was common (Gonzalez, p. 286). It was a

classic case of failed diplomacy (negotiations among leaders) in which Gregory would not be satisfied without getting everything he wanted and got nothing instead.

But Gregory's most formidable obstacle to reform was in the person of Henry IV, the emperor following Henry III. Henry III had been a staunch (strong) supporter of reform and had called the Council of Sutri in 1046 to depose three popes who made claim to the papacy. He had also appointed Bruno, a known reformer, as Pope Leo IX. He had also entrusted his young son, Henry IV, to the care of a reforming pope, Victor II, before his death. Henry IV, on the other hand, came to believe that lay investiture was necessary for the survival of the empire. The emperor must be allowed to appoint bishops who would be supportive of his rule. When extremists attempted to enforce clerical celibacy in Milan, Henry IV deposed the bishop of Milan and appointed Godfrey to fill his place—lay investiture. Gregory VII then ordered Henry to appear before him in Rome or else be deposed as the emperor and face the punishment of excommunication and hell. Henry then responded by calling a council and deposing Gregory as pope. Gregory then excommunicates Henry from the church and pronounces an *interdict* against all Henry's subjects. Therefore, Henry deposes Gregory and Gregory deposes Henry and excommunicates him from the church. The church and state were "fighting it out" to see which one was *the* universal power in the world (Kuiper, pp. 109-111; Cairns, p. 212).

As modern Christians and as Protestants, we cannot understand the affect of *interdiction* upon the church in a certain realm. What this meant was that all church services and religious practices in that locality would be stopped. Churches would be closed; no marriages would be celebrated; and no baptisms conducted except infant baptisms. Even Christian burials would cease, forcing people to give their loved ones non-Christian burials. Confession before priests would cease; consequently, there could be no absolution (forgiveness) of sins since only the priest could grant forgiveness (according to the belief at the time). Essentially this meant that the blessing of God through the medium of the church was removed from that locality because of the interdiction. The individual who was excommunicated—in this case Henry himself—was cut off from his fellow man, and anyone showing him the least kindness would also suffer the same fate. Gregory placed the whole region under the ban of excommunication which means that everyone in the realm was cut off from the church and the blessing of God (Houghton, p. 52). This was perhaps the boldest move any pope had taken against a secular ruler (Cairns, p. 212).

Henry had already made some powerful enemies among the feudal lords of Saxony, a region in Germany, who were resisting Henry's efforts to unify Germany under one centralized state. Nobles did not like the idea of a centralized state which would effectively diminish their own authority within a particular region. With their combined armies, they could be more powerful than Henry. He had also become unpopular with the people because his rule had been oppressive. When Gregory excommunicated Henry from the church, he also released all his subjects, including the feudal lords of Germany, from any obedience to him. This was just the opportunity the feudal lords were looking for who then told Henry that he must be released from the ban of excommunication or else they would rebel against him. The feudal lords also invited Gregory to a synod to be convened at Augsburg, and there would be little doubt about the conclusion of this synod. Henry would be publicly humiliated and deserted by his own nobles (Cairns, p. 212; Kuiper

Seeing himself in a desperate situation and the only solution being to humble himself before Gregory by doing penance, Henry took his wife and baby son across the Alps Mountains in the

dead of winter in 1077 to meet Gregory in Rome. The pope, for his part, had already set out for Augsburg, Germany for his meeting with the German nobles, but upon hearing that Henry was on his way—possibly with an army—he turned aside to Canossa, a fortified castle where he could be safe from Henry. Henry finds out that Gregory is at Canossa and makes his way there to humble himself before him. Gregory makes Henry wait barefoot in the snow for three days before he is willing to see him on the fourth day. (To contextualize this story, can you picture President Museveni waiting barefoot to ask forgiveness from the archbishop of Uganda?) Prostrating himself on the ground, Henry kisses Gregory's feet and begs for forgiveness. Henry has been humbled and Gregory has won the battle between church and state—but has he? (Kuiper, p. 113; Houghton, p. 52).

The real battle, according to Kuiper, is what happened in the *minds* of the major players in this epic drama. Henry knew that if he appeared before the German nobles in Augsburg as an excommunicated ruler, he would have lost their support immediately. He therefore makes a valiant effort to reach Gregory and receive his forgiveness *before* he gets to Augsburg. Once he appeared before Gregory as a penitent (a repentant sinner), Gregory would be forced to forgive him. It would be his ecclesiastical duty. Gregory knew this and was, therefore, indecisive about what to do for three days, thus making Henry wait in the snow—not to humble him, but to give himself time to think. In the end he knows he has no choice but to forgive Henry. Henry was the actual victor. By being forgiven, he had saved his empire, at least for the time being (Kuiper, pp. 113-114).

***But it was a very short victory which accomplished nothing in the long run.*** Forgiveness was neither sincerely requested nor sincerely given. It was all for show and the purpose of political maneuvering. Henry returns to Germany quickly but finds the nobles rebelling against him. Gregory, on his part, had removed Henry from the ban of excommunication but does nothing to discourage Henry's enemies from electing a different emperor to take Henry's place. Therefore, Gregory's "ambiguous posture" (leaving oneself open to being misinterpreted) toward Henry actually encouraged a civil war in Germany. He had forgiven Henry publicly but did not follow through by discouraging the rebellion of the German nobles because he did not trust him. Henry's enemies who wished to use the interdict to remove him from power continue to fight him and place another man, Rudolph, on his throne. Germany and Italy are now divided into two different factions. Gregory once again places him under the ban of excommunication. (For what reason? Did he not grant him forgiveness?) This time the ban has no effect on Henry or his followers, and most of the bishops depose Gregory as pope and elect another pope, Clement III.

Germany suffers unspeakable ruin from civil war. Rudolph, the rival king, is wounded in battle and dies. Henry, gaining momentum from Rudolph's death, marches to Rome in 1081 to take over the city and install Clement III on the papal throne in Gregory's place. The Romans fight bravely against Henry's forces for some time but eventually surrender. Clement III is installed as the new pope and crowns Henry as emperor. Gregory, having no other resources at his disposal, desperately calls upon the Normans of southern Italy (the Scandinavians who had settled in France and southern Italy) for help in driving Henry from Rome, a plea which they respond to favorably. Unable to defeat the Normans, Henry retreats from Rome. With Henry driven from Rome, it appears that Gregory is now secure, but the Normans are enraged at the Roman population for having surrendered the city to Henry and the enemies of the pope. They decide to punish the Roman population severely for their cowardice, killing many citizens, burning buildings and selling thousands of Romans into slavery. The atrocities committed by the

Norman armies against the city of Rome caused the Roman citizens to blame Gregory who had summoned the Normans for help. They now despised the same man they had adored 12 years earlier crying, “Let Hildebrand be pope!” Gregory, despised and fearful of the same people who once loved him, must now flee with the Normans to southern Italy. He dies in southern Italy in 1085, a broken man whose dreams of a universal kingdom of God on earth with the universal pope as its head dying with him. His last words were, “I have loved justice and hated iniquity. Therefore I die in exile” (Kuiper, p. 113; Gonzalez, p. 288).

### ***XXI. The Continuation of the Investiture Controversy after Gregory’s Death***

The investiture controversy continued for thirty-five years after Gregory’s death. While Clement III remained as the pope chosen by Henry IV, the reforming party of Gregory VII (Hildebrand) chose Victor III who died shortly after assuming the office. He was followed by Pope Urban II, also of the reforming party, who is known best for proclaiming the first of the Holy Crusades to win back the Holy Land from the Muslims—one of the dreams of Gregory VII. Urban continued the reforming policies of Gregory and for that reason ran into conflict with Philip I of France whom he excommunicated for putting his wife away to marry another. Paschal II followed Urban II in 1099 and served until 1118. Meanwhile, Clement III died, the rival who was chosen by Henry IV to replace Gregory; and the reformers had hoped that his death would mark the end of the schism, but Henry chose another to take his place and the schism continued. Henry IV died in 1106 and in an effort to make peace with his successor, Henry V, Paschal II declared all appointments of bishops during the previous reign of Henry IV were valid, regardless of lay investiture. The condition of this truce was that all appointments under the new reign of Henry V must be made properly ***without any lay investiture by the emperor***. They must, instead, be appointed by the rules of the Synod of 1059, chosen by the College of Cardinals and then presented to the people for approval.

Henry V did not approve of this solution, but a compromise position was reached three years later. Henry proposed that he, the emperor, would give up the right to choose bishops as long as the church and its bishops would relinquish (give up) their privileges as feudal lords, that is, the right to control land and wealth. Henry reasoned correctly that as long as the church and its bishops and abbots had the control and use of vast wealth—wealth which could be used to raise armies against the emperor—the emperor could not afford to relinquish his right to choose bishops who were supportive of his reign. His proposal also highlighted a point of inconsistency in the reform movement which was mentioned earlier—selective poverty. If the reformers wished to be consistent with the Benedictine principle of poverty, the ***church*** itself along with its ***monasteries***, and not just the monks and abbots, should be willing to follow the principle of poverty.

Pope Paschal accepted Henry’s proposal, but as you can imagine, it was not well-received by the bishops and abbots of the church who would now be deprived of their temporal powers. The proposal was also bad news for the nobles in Germany who figured Henry was up to something and would later strip them of their privileges just as he had stripped the bishops of theirs. In Germany many of the nobles rebelled against Henry (Henry V, son of Henry IV), and the higher ranking bishops excommunicated him. Henry responded to this insurrection (rebellion) by invading Italy. Paschal was forced to flee to the castle of St. Angelo where he later died. Gelasius II was elected as the new pope but met with stiff resistance from the very beginning of his papacy, suffering imprisonment, torture, and finally death.

Gelasius was replaced by Pope Calixtus II who came to an agreement with Henry V at the Concordat of Worms in 1122. Under the terms of the Concordat, bishops were to be (1) freely elected *by other bishops* in the presence of the temporal ruler but not *by* the temporal ruler. (2) The symbols of spiritual power, the ring and the staff, were to be given to the elected bishop by the pope or his representative. (3) The bishop must also swear loyalty to the temporal ruler who was also the bishop's feudal lord from whom the bishop would receive all feudal rights, privileges, and possessions. By these measures the church had essentially freed itself from the control of the temporal state. It could choose its own bishops without interference from the temporal lords or even the emperor. Furthermore, the ban on clerical marriage prevented the clergy from becoming a special *hereditary cast* of officers who received their offices from their earthly fathers. And since they received their offices through other *church officers*, they would be loyal to them instead of *temporal rulers*. On the other hand, the emperor and other temporal rulers maintained control of the feudal properties and wealth which could not be used against them by the bishops. The emperor also agreed to return all the possessions which were owned by the church and to force other feudal lords to do likewise. Gregory, who died in 1085, did not get to see the end of the lay investiture controversy, but he had succeeded in laying the foundation for it upon which other popes were able to build. The *power of the papacy continued to grow* until it reached its zenith (highest point) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Cairns, pp. 214-215; Gonzalez, pp. 289-291).

## ***XXII. Lessons from Church History***

In all of these reforms, we see little that deals directly with the doctrines of scripture pertaining to salvation or the role of the church in missions. There is nothing about justification by faith alone in Christ alone. There is nothing about the Lord's Supper and the refutation of transubstantiation which had been brewing in the church since Radbertus wrote his book, *On the Body and the Blood of Christ*. There is no refutation of purgatory which had been popularized by Gregory the Great. It is likely that very few evangelical Christians existed in the church at this time but many who were confused about the relationship between grace and good works. The masses of people only understood that the church had been held hostage for 150 years by the rich and powerful nobles and bishops who were determined to control the church for their own selfish interests of money and power. And how did this crisis arise in the first place? Many of the problems which dominated the attention of the church during this time were problems which had been *created by an unbiblical form of church government*—a hierarchical government consisting of a pope who had authority over other bishops who in turn had authority over other parish priests. But the Bible gives no support whatever for such a system. To compound this problem, the accumulation of land and other wealth by the church and the monasteries attracted men into church offices who had very little if any interest in Christ or in the spiritual welfare of His church. The hierarchical system was easily hijacked by unprincipled men who used it to promote their ungodly interests. With any hierarchical system in which power is concentrated at the top there is the serious risk of corruption. One can always follow the money trail to the top in which large amounts of money and property are being managed by those who occupy high positions in this system. The system can work well if those in power are principled men who have God's interests at heart, but the system can be easily hijacked by those who see the opportunity for personal gain.

But what if there is no hierarchy to control? What if there are only churches and presbyteries and elders who—in theory at least—are equal in authority and provide the needed checks and

balances upon the activities of one another? We should not be so naive (easily persuaded) to believe that greed and lust for authority cannot exist in the Presbyterian system of government, because it certainly does. Pastors are sinful human beings. Nevertheless, the Presbyterian system of government itself can be a safeguard against the accumulation of power and money. What African pastors must guard against are the temptations introduced into the church by the influx (flowing in) of Western money which sometimes disrupts this balance of authority and confuses one's motivation and judgment. Decisions must be made on the basis of Scripture, not on the basis of Western support and the fear of losing this support. Nor should the checks and balances provided by a plurality of elders be disrupted because one elder has connections with western money which promotes him in the eyes of other Africans.

Western Christians, on the other hand, must guard against the temptation to “help” the African church by offering salaries to African pastors which are too high for the African church to replicate (reproduce) without Western “help”. This help becomes a hindrance instead. By supporting African pastors with unrealistically high salaries, we are introducing a foreign element into the system which obscures (confuses) the responsibilities of African congregations to support their own pastors and produces the temptation of worldly interests. We may also unintentionally create an unofficial hierarchy of pastors within the Presbyterian government whose power is based solely on their connections with Western money. When carefully examined, the temptations thus introduced are not far different from those which almost destroyed the church in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

We must acknowledge that there are literally thousands of faithful African pastors who are being helped by the West and who are fulfilling their responsibilities with honor and integrity. Not everyone can be corrupted with money, and to say otherwise is a gross oversimplification. But their success is beside the point (irrelevant to the argument). We must be careful not to create unbiblical and unnecessary opportunities which are useful to Satan in corrupting the church. While only the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil—and not money itself—money is nevertheless a wild animal which must be respected as a potential danger. If we let it out of its cage, it can quickly devour us.

After more than 200 years of hard work, war, blood, human wreckage, and endless negotiations, what did the church or the reforming popes, bishops, and monks have to show for all their labor? The major spiritual problems of the church remained untouched, for nothing had improved in terms of the church's understanding of salvation, the nature of God or the nature of man. ***The whole church had been entangled in a controversy about the control of wealth and political power both of which could have been avoided had the leadership of the church truly understood the kind of kingdom Jesus intended to establish with His church.*** Satan had done his work well, and the church had become its own worst enemy. He had side-tracked the church away from the major issues. Instead, he had been able to focus the church's attention on wealth and property, politics and power, and Satan is still doing this today.

### ***XXIII. The Final Break between the Western Church and the Eastern Church***

Not much has been said about the Eastern church throughout our study of church history, and we may be led to believe that the Eastern church and the Western church were completely separate from one another from the beginning. Such is not the case, and there was no official break between East and West until 1054. Yet, we may also say with accuracy that the East and West



began to go their separate ways as long ago as 330 AD when Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople. This led to the political division of the empire which, in turn, led to the eventual ecclesiastical division of the empire. Theodosius had placed the administration of the Eastern and Western areas of the empire under separate heads in 395, and when the Western portion of the Roman Empire fell in 476, this political division of the empire was complete. Now that the Western portion was isolated from the East, the bishop of Rome became the most important unifying figure in the Western portion of the empire, and he was too far away from the Eastern emperor to be under his supervision and control. Consequently the bishop of Rome became not only the ecclesiastical head of the whole Western church but also the unofficial political head of the whole region which was once the Western Roman Empire—“unofficial” because the West had been overrun by the advancing barbarians who were in political control.

The Eastern portion of the empire was able to fight off the barbarian invasions as well as prevent the Muslims from capturing Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire (Eastern Empire) continued for 1000 years after the fall of Rome in 476, sometimes with very strong Emperors like Justinian. The consequence of a continuing Eastern Empire led by an emperor was that the *emperor in the East always played a major role in the affairs of the church even in deciding theological controversies*. After all, it was the Eastern emperors who had saved the empire from the barbarian and Islamic invasions which earned loyalty and respect from their subjects—at least those subjects in Greece, the Balkans, and those portions of the empire which did not fall to Islam. (We must remember that the Eastern Empire lost Palestine, Syria, Egypt and all North Africa to the invading Muslims.) The posture of Eastern emperors toward the church was set by Constantine when he convened the Council of Nicea in 325. This became the established pattern. From the Council of Nicea in 325 to the seventh council in Nicea in 787, the Eastern emperor always convened (called) the councils and presided over them either in person or through a representative (*Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity*, “*The Eastern Church*”, Harlie Kay Gallatin p. 239).

Thus, from 325 onward, the Eastern emperors were continually interfering in the affairs of the Eastern church and sometimes in the affairs of the Western church. The emperor in the East considered himself the legitimate emperor of the whole Roman Empire, including the West, even after the barbarian invasions and the fall of Rome in 476. Likewise, the pope in Rome considered himself the universal leader of the Eastern church because Rome had preeminence (a quality that exceeds others) above the bishops (patriarchs) in the East, including Constantinople. *The idea of the emperor as head of the church was carried over from the long-standing tradition of Roman emperors who considered themselves as representatives of God walking on earth and as heads of the Roman state religion*. Constantine himself, although a professing Christian, was never liberated from this tradition, and after his death his three sons did not object to their father being declared a god by the Roman senate. “Thus the ironic anomaly [abnormality] occurred, that Constantine, who had done so much to the detriment [harm] of paganism became one of the pagan gods” (Gonzalez, p. 123). Cairns has summarized the religious and political scene of East and West: “Emperors were almost popes in the East, and in the West popes were almost emperors. This gave the two churches an entirely different outlook concerning temporal power” (p. 203).

While the Eastern church was concerned about solving theological controversies with philosophical language, the Latin Western church did not have the same problems formulating orthodox beliefs (Cairns, p. 203). We have seen already that by 200 Tertullian had already coined the term “Trinity” and had formulated the doctrine of the two natures of Christ in one christcommunitystudycenter.org (originally written in September, 2007)

person. Such doctrines were vigorously, and sometimes violently, debated by the Eastern church until the Council of Chalcedon in 451 but calmly accepted in the West by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. By the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century with Augustine, the Western church was focusing its attention on the doctrine of man and the means of salvation. Furthermore, while the mission of the church in evangelism was often the focus of the Western church—manifested in the conversion of the barbarians and the outreach of the church to England, Scotland, Germany and other lands—the Eastern church was not at all consumed with the passion of reaching others with the message of the gospel, however clouded this message was with deficient theology.

Other differences also contributed to the East-West division. While celibacy was practiced among all the clergy in the West, only those who were bishops had to remain unmarried in the East; the parish priests could marry. The Latin language was used in the West while only Greek was used in the East, a difference which sometimes led to misunderstandings. Theologically, the Western church believed that the Holy Spirit proceeded not only from the Father but also from the Son, but the Eastern church held that the Spirit proceeded only from the Father. This difference became a source of contention between the East and West when Photius, the patriarch of Constantinople charged Nicholas I of the West with heresy in 867—not a very helpful way to keep the church united.

Over a hundred years earlier in 726, the *iconoclastic controversy* had also widened the gap between East and West. The Eastern emperor, Leo III (to be distinguished from Pope Leo III who crowned Charlemagne as emperor in 800) had forbidden kneeling before pictures or images of Jesus and in 730 he ordered by imperial edict (law) that all such pictures or images (with the exception of the cross) be removed from the churches and destroyed (cf. Ex. 20: 4-5; part of his motivation for doing this was the Muslim charge of idolatry). The bishop of Rome responded to this edict by condemning *iconoclasm*, the destruction of images, thus opposing the Eastern emperor. Emperor Leo retaliated (responded in defense) by removing Sicily, southern Italy and the entire western part of the Balkans and Greece from the bishopric of Rome and placing them under the bishopric (or patriarchate) of Constantinople. Gallatin argues that this Eastern interference in the affairs of the Western church, “more than anything else, forced the bishop of Rome to seek the support and protection of the Franks” (p. 247).

Both under Emperor Leo III and his son, Constantine V (Eastern emperors), those who supported the use of icons (images) in worship were excommunicated and sent into exile. Fifty thousand monks who used icons—and who sold them to others for income—fled the monasteries located in the region immediately surrounding Constantinople (Gallatin, p. 247). The emperor also destroyed relics—articles such as bone fragments claimed to be pieces of Peter’s bones which were given sacred value. He also condemned prayers to the saints—e.g. Peter, Paul, the Virgin Mary, etc. *John of Damascus*, the leading theologian of the 8<sup>th</sup> century who was at a safe distance in Palestine at the time, took a position against the emperor, arguing that an image was not of the same substance as the thing it represented, and therefore it was acceptable to use an icon *to assist the believer in worship*. There was a difference between *worship*, which belongs only to God, and *veneration* (honor or respect) given to images. Such veneration was similar to the honor given to the Bible (Gallatin, p. 248; Gonzalez, p. 260). John’s position was accepted at the Council of Nicea in 787 and is the official position of the Eastern Orthodox Church today which makes liberal use of images or icons in worship.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Thus far in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Eastern emperor Constantine V, following the lead of his father Leo III, was forbidding the use of icons and was persecuting all monks and bishops who used them. However, the Western church still used

images and pictures and did not appreciate the interference of the Eastern emperor into its affairs, an interference which widened the gap between the two. Furthermore, the prolonged controversy about images in the Eastern church convinced the West that the church in the East was merely a “puppet” in the hands of the Eastern emperor (Gonzalez, p. 264). In the latter part of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Charlemagne—emperor of the restored Western Roman Empire from 771-814—took a stand with the western pope in favor of using visible symbols (icons); thus, interfering in the affairs of the Eastern church—likewise unappreciated.

The final schism between East and West occurred in 1054. Michael Cerularius, patriarch of Constantinople, condemned the use of unleavened bread used in communion by the Western church. Leo of Ochrid, the archbishop of Bulgaria, furthermore criticized the Western church for making celibacy a universal rule among the clergy. To answer their objections, Leo IX (Bruno, the reforming pope) sent Humbert as an emissary to Constantinople. Humbert was a zealous reformer who had accompanied Bruno to Rome to accept the papacy from Henry III in 1049. We must remember that two of the most important principles of reform—according to Bruno and Humbert—were the discontinuation of clerical marriage and the investiture of bishops by the emperor. Since the Eastern church had always been under the control of the emperor and because clerical marriage was widely practiced in the East, Humbert came to Constantinople not so much for reconciliation but to correct the Eastern church of its errors. He therefore got a little high-handed in the dispute, excommunicating Cerularius and his followers. This was followed by Cerularius, patriarch of Constantinople, excommunicating Pope Leo IX and his followers. Thus the Western church had essentially excommunicated the Eastern church and the Eastern church had essentially excommunicated the Western church. The schism was now complete and has never been healed to this day although the mutual excommunication was removed by Pope Paul VI and Athenagoras in 1965 (Cairns, pp. 205-206).

The Eastern church has remained theologically and evangelistically stagnant since the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Its main success in missionary outreach has been the formation of the Russian Orthodox Church during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. This church was the unifying force of the Russian nation which allowed them to survive the Mongolian domination of Russia for 200 years beginning in 1240 (Gonzalez, p. 264). The Russian church also survived atheistic communism for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from 1917 to 1989—no small accomplishment. Yet, the Russian Orthodox Church has also proven to be the stagnant offspring of the Eastern Orthodox Church with little current emphasis in missions and evangelism. When the Reformation occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with its emphasis on justification by faith alone and its equal emphasis on the sole authority of scripture, the Eastern church derived no theological benefit from it—nor missionary zeal. In the first five centuries, until the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Eastern church had dominated the history of the church with its precise doctrinal formulations. For this we should be grateful. But from that time on, the history of the church until the modern era has been the history of the Western church and not the Eastern church. ***It is the Western church and its evangelical offspring—the Protestant church—which has been the dynamic force that has changed the course of world history by spreading the gospel to all the nations.*** In the centuries to come, and if the Lord delays His return, it remains to be seen from which corner of the world God will raise up a mighty army to fight His spiritual battles and direct the course of world events. Africa perhaps? But such a privilege and responsibility will not belong to a church which is feint in heart and satisfied with spiritual and theological mediocrity (being average and ordinary). It will only come from a church energized by holy zeal for the word of God and the desire to take every thought—and every culture—captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10: 5; Matt. 15: 3).

*XXV. The “Holy” (?) Crusades*