

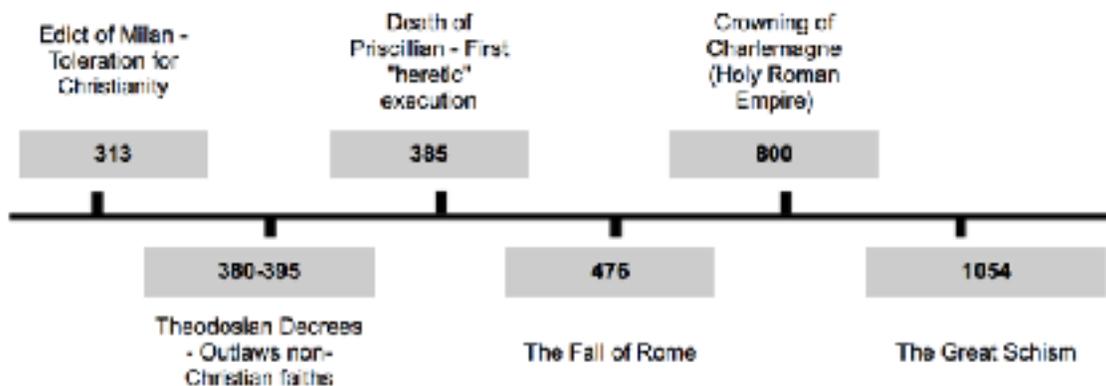
CHRISTIAN HISTORY 101

SESSION FOUR: The “Muddy Middle” - Medieval Christianity

- Politics: Deepening Constantinianism
- Theology: Developing Sacramentalism
- Ecclesiology: Dominating Institutionalism

POLITICS: DEEPENING CONSTANTINIANISM

Constantinianism or “The Constantinian Shift” was a transition of “Christianity” from a way of life or Jesus-movement, to a formalized religion to be used as a tool of the Roman Empire. Christianity was commandeered and rebranded to accommodate the goals and ambitions of the state (Named after the Roman Emperor Constantine, who first legalized Christianity in 313 AD, and inscribed Christian symbols on his army’s weaponry.)



Medieval Christianity can be divided into two parts. The “Middle Ages,” from the Fall of Rome (476) to the Great Schism (1054); and the “High Middle Ages,” from the Great Schism to the the beginning of the Renaissance (circa 1350).

Major Political, Economic, and Social factors of the period included:

- 1) No unifying continental power.
- 2) Feudalism, serfdom, and cults of loyalty.
- 3) Absolute fear: Invaders, starvation, plague.
- 4) Widespread poverty and subsistence living.

5) A search for “European” identity, safety, and stability.

The “shift” that had begun with Constantine was completed by Charlemagne. On Christmas Day in the year 800 he was crowned “Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire” by Pope Leo III in St. Peter’s Basilica. The Charlemagne model dominated Europe for the next 700 years, and greatly influence the relationship of “church and state” through the 19th century. French royalty carried the title, “By the Grace of God elected Holy Roman Emperor, ever Augustus” until Napoleon in the early 1800s.

THEOLOGY: DEVELOPING SACRAMENTALISM

A sacrament was first formally defined by Augustine (circa 400): “An outward sign of an inward grace that has been instituted by Jesus Christ.” He said there were three: Baptism, the Lord’s Table, and Ordination.

“Sacramentalism,” however, is an institutionalized system of belief and practice. It is holding to the observance of the sacraments as necessary for salvation and/or good standing with the church (i.e. God). In sacramentalism the church itself is a sacrament of salvation. That is, as it has developed over the centuries, the church possesses and controls the only means of salvation.

Sacramentalism was debated throughout the Middle Ages, but ultimately codified by two High Middle Ages theologians: Peter Lombard (1096-1160) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who have given the church enormous power over the lives of individuals, establishing the trajectory for traditional Roman Catholic theology.

- 1) Baptism (Ancient, never disputed, current meaning based on Augustine)
- 2) Confirmation (Formerly a part of Baptism, post-Constantine development)
- 3) The Eucharist (Ancient, never disputed but hotly debated; “transubstantiation” adopted in 1215)
- 4) Penance (Shaped by Augustine but never formalized until 1215)
- 5) Anointing of the Sick (Ancient, shaped by Augustine)
- 6) Holy Orders (Codified at Second Council of Nicaea in 787)
- 7) Matrimony (A post-Charlemagne development as there was no “official” process for marriage in the Middle Ages, first codified in 1184 to exclude heretics)

The seven sacraments as we have them today, were finally and formally adopted at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Note: The Council of Trent was the first Roman Catholic Council after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation (March 22.)

ECCLESIOLOGY: DOMINATING INSTITUTIONALISM

Ecclesiology comes from two Greek words. Ekklesia, meaning “church” or “congregation,” and logia, meaning “logic” or knowledge. It is the study of the structure of the church or the nature of the church.

The “recipe” for Roman Catholic domination in the Middle Ages is clear: The Church filled the collapsed power vacuum with its well organized hierarchy, and imposed a massive collection of authoritative, codified laws onto a largely uneducated, fearful society. It was the defining institution of Europe for a thousand years.

European society fell into three categories: Workers (serfs, farmers, tradesmen, etc.); Soldiers (lords, knights, footmen, etc.); and Clergy (cardinals, bishops, priests, etc.)

Simultaneously, there were no other geographical “competitors” to hedge against Roman power.



Jerusalem: City was destroyed in 70 AD and not rebuilt for almost a hundred years; sees a revival with Constantine.

Antioch: Flourished for centuries but was smaller than Rome in size and importance.

Alexandria: A true “competitor” to Roman power until the Theodosian Decrees

Constantinople (Byzantium): Remained far enough away from Rome to develop its own unique flavor; was the Eastern Capital of the Roman Empire. Constantinople was the only check against Roman expansion.

The Great Schism of 1054 broke the church into two pieces: Roman and Byzantine, known today as Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. There were multiple theological differences (not to mention divisions of language, politics, and geography), but the main issue was jurisdiction. The church at Constantinople, with its surrounding and included territories, would not submit to Roman authority.

1054: Mutual excommunication

1204: Constantinople sacked by Crusaders on way to Jerusalem

1453: Constantinople falls to the Ottoman Empire

1870: First Vatican Council reasserts Roman superiority over the East and codifies Immaculate Conception of Mary

1965: Second Vatican Council: Mutual “anathemas” rescinded

1999: Pope John Paul II visited Romania, the first pope since the Great Schism to visit an Eastern Orthodox country

The structure, worship practices, and languages are all different in these two churches, but share similar theology with noted exceptions:

Augustine: He is virtually ignored in the Eastern Orthodox faith.

Transubstantiation: Respected but not taught by Eastern Orthodox.

Hell and Purgatory: The Western view (Dante) is rejected and Purgatory is viewed as complete conjecture by the East.

Original Sin: Orthodox do not believe sin originates in humanity, but it is from the devil/outside evil. Salvation involves what the Orthodox call, “Theosis.”