

>Session 5: The Church in History—Constantine to the Great Schism

>Martyrs, Confessors, and Apostates

In our last lecture we looked at various persecutions in the early church, to see how we could learn from, and be encouraged by, those who endured persecution. Persecution has various effects on different people. Some avoid persecution by leaving the dangerous situation. Some avoid persecution by apostatizing (renouncing their faith). Others stay faithful to death—martyrs, while others remain faithful through torture and do not die. That group of people came to be known as confessors.

>As we already saw in our section on persecution, Decius issued an empire wide persecution on Christians in the middle of the 200s. This persecution lasted about ten years until Emperor Gallienus (253- 268 AD) put a stop to it in 261AD. During this decade of persecution many believers apostatized or ran away from the empire. In the year 249AD, Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, along with many Christians fled the region to avoid torture and death. However, a group of Christians decided to remain in the region, they endured persecution and even torture and remained faithful to Christ. This group of people became known as the “Cathari,” or “pure ones” because they made it through the “fire” and came out the other side. This group of Cathari are what we identified earlier as confessors.

The church in Carthage was leaderless because Cyprian fled persecution, so in his absence the confessors took over the leadership of the Church (remember, there was no email or cell phones. No one knew where their bishop was or if he was alive). The confessors then appointed a man by the name of Novation to be their new bishop. When the persecution ended in 261AD many of the Christians who had apostatized decided they wanted to rejoin the Church. However, the confessors, under the leadership of Novation, would not allow them to come back. The confessors said, they renounced Christ, they shall remain permanently outside of the Church.

Not long after the persecution ended, Cyprian reappeared in Carthage ready to continue as bishop. But the confessors were not happy. They believed Cyprian abandoned them, which meant he abandoned his position in the Church, so they rejected him as a bishop. Cyprian then takes the issue to the Church in Rome (which was becoming the authority in the wider Church), and they side with Cyprian. Novation was never officially consecrated by the Church authority, therefore, Cyprian was still the rightful bishop of Carthage. Cyprian returned to Carthage with the authority of the Church and removed Novation, excommunicated the confessors, and reinstated the

apostates in the Church. The confessors remained outside of the Carthage church for centuries and had their own gathering as the Church.

>Interesting questions were raised through this controversy:

1. Should heretics or apostates be rebaptized into the Church?
2. If a group breaks away from the wider Church, should they still be considered “the Church?”

What are your thoughts regarding this story? How would you answer these questions?

>The End of Roman Persecutions

Christians suffered at the hands of the Roman empire for about two-hundred and fifty years. It was not until the conversion of Constantine when the Church was able to experience peace. Constantine was quite an interesting person. Christians in the 4th Century, as well as Christians today, cannot agree whether Constantine’s effect on the Church was more positive or negative. Constantine was the first person to unite Church and State. From the modern perspective of American Democracy, union of Church and State is a negative thing. However, from an Eastern Orthodox view, union of Church and State is what God wants.

>We should ask ourselves, “Is it important to have Christian politicians in office?” Do we believe, like Evangelical Churches, that Christians should serve at every level of government, with the purpose of positively affecting society? Or, do we believe, like the Anabaptists, that citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven have no business getting involved in matters of the Kingdom of the World? I think we all know that it is very difficult to find a Christian leader who can authentically live out Christian values, without trying to get something from the Church, or Christians, in return. Whatever our view of Christians in politics, or our view of Constantine, the fact is, when Constantine “converted,” the Church experienced peace.¹ Because of Constantine’s influence, the Church grew greatly, and the whole of the empire was affected.

>Constantine and the Empire

¹ I put “Converted” in quotes because it is not clear if Constantine converted to Christianity in the sense where he renounced his former life of sin and lived as a faithful disciple of Christ. He may have simply viewed Christianity as a good religion, or a slightly better religion, while continuing to observe various Pagan religions.

Constantine grew up in a home with a Christian mother and a Pagan father who was a well-respected Roman general. Constantine decided to choose a religion that was somewhere in the middle of Paganism and Christianity, and he decided to be a Solar monotheist (monotheism is the worship of one god and his god was the sun—"Sol Invictus"—*the unconquered Sun*). It seems that Constantine never fully separated his understanding and worship of "the sun" and "the Son."

> The story of Constantine's "conversion" begins in 313 AD as he prepares to go to battle against another Roman general. The day before the battle at the Milvian Bridge, Constantine looks up into the sky and sees a sign from heaven, which to him looks like the first two letters of Christ—the chi and the rho. Constantine sees this as a sign from the "sun god" and the "Son God." Later that night, he has a dream where a voice tells him to put the chi-rho on the shields of the soldiers which will ensure victory in the battle. The next day he puts this symbol on the shields of the soldiers, and sure enough, they defeat the other army. He believes the "Son God" (Son of God) gave him victory in battle.² > From that time on, Constantine identifies with Christians. Later in 313 the Edict of Milan was issued which made Christianity an official religion in the Roman Empire. Constantine did not make Christianity "the religion" of the empire, but made Christianity one of the approved religions, alongside all the other religions.

With his new appreciation of Christianity, Constantine decided to remake the empire. Constantine limited (but did not stop) Pagan sacrifices. No one was required to sacrifice to the gods anymore. He replaced many of the Pagan symbols in the empire with the Christian symbol "chi-rho." Constantine was the first person to popularize the cross as a Christian symbol for art/decoration. The early "Christian" symbol, before Constantine, was the "Ichthus." > The Ichthus was the outline of a fish with the Greek letters: Iota, Chi, Theta, Upsilon, Sigma inside. Ichthus is an acronym for: Iesous, Christos, Theos, Huios, Sotor—"Jesus, Christ, God, Son, Savior." He also decided to shift the capital of the empire from Rome to Constantinople—*the city of Constantine*. He said Rome had too many Pagan temples, so he wanted to relocate, and make a fully "Christian city" (Constantinople is the modern-day Istanbul, Turkey). Rome would then be the center of Pagan religions and Constantinople would be the center for Christianity. Constantine was not against or overtly for any religion. Through his policies, he was somehow able to make both Christians and Pagans happy.

> Constantine and the Church

² The "sign" he saw in the sky was most likely a Parhelia, which is a solar phenomenon when it is cold outside. It is not uncommon, but also not common. It can look like a cross with a large circle of light around it.

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We mentioned above that because of Constantine, persecution of Christians stopped. However, that was not the only way he affected Christianity and the Church. Before Constantine, Christians were a poor, persecuted, minority. But during the reign of Constantine, the number of Roman citizens in the empire, who claimed to be Christians, doubled. He replaced his Pagan governmental advisors with Christian advisors. He exempted clergy (church workers) from paying taxes, and he began giving clergy governmental salaries. He funded and built large Church buildings known as ➤Basilicas. Constantine passed laws to protect women and children and he supported the Christian's social justice programs. Finally, he promoted Catholicity (oneness and unity) and tried to get all the Christian bishops to work together. Constantine was the one who called the bishops together for the Council of Nicaea in 325. However, we can read in the later history of the Church that Constantine was not really concerned about Arius's heresy, but he was concerned about the division and fighting in his empire. Before the Council of Nicaea was called, Constantine tried to get the Catholic bishops to accept his view as an orthodox view. Constantine also tried to mediate the Donatist controversy in North Africa decades before Augustine got involved. The Donatists didn't listen to Constantine, so he ended up sending his soldiers to chase the Donatists out of the empire.

As we have already seen, Constantine's practices and beliefs did not regularly correspond to biblical Christianity. Constantine held the belief, like many of the time, that baptism cleansed a person of all committed sins. Therefore, Constantine did not get baptized until right before he died. He knew that he would continue to sin as emperor of the Roman empire so he wanted to wait until the last possible moment for baptism, to ensure he would go to heaven. Furthermore, Constantine kept the title "Pontifex Maximus" the whole time he was emperor. The Pontifex Maximus was the chief high priest to the gods in Roman religion. You can see why some people question whether Constantine was a true believer. Can you remain the chief high priest to Pagan gods and be an authentic Christian at the same time?

Constantine introduced various practices within the Church that are still in use today. He was the first to introduce the role and title of priest into the Church. The position of "priest," along with the long robes they wore, were brought in from Pagan religions. He introduced a formal hierarchy into the Church structure and instituted veneration of martyrs—saints³—and he increased and normalized the use of relics in

³ Veneration of saints is to show their spirits great respect or reverence. In the Catholic church, and some parts of the Anglican communion, Christians can pray to saints and petition them to go to Christ on our behalf.

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worship services.⁴ Also, during the time of Constantine, the day for Easter (Pascha) was officially set and the empire officially began to celebrate Christmas on December 25th.

What were the effects of Constantine making Christianity normal within the Roman empire. Bishops were less likely to critique the emperor or the government because they were receiving a salary. As the old saying goes, “do not bite the hand that feeds you.” With the government and Church being so close, it was like the agenda of the Emperor, or the Roman empire had been baptized. People believed Constantine and the Roman empire were Christian, therefore, whatever they did was instructed or approved by God and the Church. With all the chi-rhos and crosses displayed around the empire, people began associating those symbols with Rome. Roman’s display the cross, the cross represents Jesus, therefore, Jesus also is closely tied to the Roman empire. When people see Rome they see Jesus. When they think about Jesus, they can think about Rome. All those extravagant Basilicas (churches) were used for worship but also as shrines for dead saints, government officials, and politicians. Churches were no longer simply the “house of God.”

Questions:

1. What do we think about the relationship of Church and Government?
2. Do we think they should be separate or together?
 - a. If together, what should be the boundaries? Should the president introduce new beliefs or practices? Should the government ever get involved in the operations of the Church?

>Monasticism

Not everyone was happy that the Church and state came together with Constantine. Some people were opposed to the Church hierarchy in the Roman empire. There was also criticism about the great increase of Christian population during the time of Constantine. Some say that Christianity in the Roman empire was a mile wide but only an inch deep. That means there were many who identified as Christians but in practice, still lived as Pagans. After the persecutions were over, and Christianity became a popular religion, many people joined the Church who were not committed to Christ or to living out his commands. Now that clergy received salaries and tax breaks from the government, some bishops fought over privilege, power, and position, and eventually, the rich began to control the Church. Some Christians asked the question,

⁴ A relic is a sacred object (bone of a saint, piece of a cross, nail, clothes, etc.) that is believed to contain some spiritual (magical?) power. Christians can touch a relic while praying and it is believed that, because of the relic, their prayers are sure to be answered. Christian armies in the Medieval time carried relics with them to ensure victory in battle.

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“How can we live truly faithful lives, dedicated to Christ, without compromising our faith in this new “Christian Empire?”

>For those looking for authentic Christian faith and practice, asceticism became the answer. **Asceticism** is a lifestyle where a person practices severe self-discipline and avoids all forms of indulgence and pleasure. Ascetics wanted to fully live the way of Christ. Ascetics read how Christ gave up everything, and they thought they should follow his example by giving up what they had for Christ’s glory.

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:5–11 NLT-SE).

Ascetics wanted to be living martyrs. Although there was no longer persecution, ascetics decided that they could die to themselves and the rest of the world and live only to worship Christ. Jesus said blessed are the poor (Luke 6:20-21), so ascetics rejected wealth. Jesus said he had nowhere to lay his head (Matt 8:20), so they rejected owning personal property. Ascetics had no personal belongings, they slept on the floor, they refused to eat good tasting food (they would not use salt when cooking). Paul said it was better to remain single for the purpose of serving the Lord (1Cor 7:32-35), so they chose not to marry. Ascetics rejected physical desires in the hopes that their spiritual person would thrive. While living these extreme lives of self-denial, they worked to remove all unloving behavior, and tried to love everyone through humility. Ascetics attempted to love others in the same way that Christ loved them.

This Idea of ascetic life came from a mixture of Scripture, tradition, and a Greek philosophy called Gnosticism. While Scripture and tradition are good sources for Christian belief and practice, Pagan philosophy is not. Gnostic influence did a lot of damage to the beliefs in the early Church. Gnosticism said that “the spiritual” was the best and “the physical” was evil, sinful, and corrupted. Gnostic understanding said the body and pleasure are evil and they should be rejected so the spirit could win in the battle between flesh and spirit. There are very odd stories of ascetics within the history of the Church. >One ascetic spent most of his life praying on top of a pole. All of his waking hours he would stand and pray on top of a pole that was only large enough to hold his feet. Another ascetic enjoyed having physical wounds on his body. As Jesus was wounded for us this man would have wounds and not treat them with any medicine. He was also proud when his wounds became infected and filled with maggots.

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Apparently, his wounds smelled so bad that no one could come talk or pray with him. But he felt he was honoring Christ by the way he lived.

There is nothing wrong with fasting, abstaining, or giving up pleasures out of reverence for Christ, but the idea that the spirit is good and the physical (material) is evil does not correspond with Scripture. In the Genesis creation narrative, God created everything, including our physical bodies, and said “it was very good” (Gen 1:31). While sin corrupted creation, Christ came in a physical body (John 1:14) to redeem both God’s physical creations and God’s spiritual creations. Since Christ’s redemption applies to the spiritual and the physical we should remember the words God spoke to Peter in his vision in Acts. “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean” (Acts 10:15 NLT-SE).

The understanding that the spirit is good, and physical is bad is still present today. Some hyper-spiritual Pentecostal groups preach a message of resisting physical desires and wants and focusing only on the spirit. But there are also modern-day ascetics that base their life on the teachings and life of Christ and tradition of the ascetic followers of Christ. The Catholic Worker Movement, which was most active throughout the 1900s, is an example of a modern-day ascetic group. One of the most famous ascetics of the group was a woman by the name of Dorothy Day (1897- 1980).

>Members of the Catholic Worker Movement were lay people (not ordained clergy) in the Catholic Church who made the choice to live in voluntary poverty, to identify with Christ and the poor who they were assisting. They devoted much time to agriculture, and the fruit of their labor went to feeding themselves and the poor. They were strict pacifists (nonviolent), they focused on personal holiness, and they worked to practically live out the commands of Christ given in the Sermon on the Mount. The Catholic Workers advocated for the marginalized and worked to right social injustices. Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement **has inspired many** to action; to advocate for the voiceless and to work to end social injustice.

“What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words—we can, to a certain extent, change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as our friend.”

—*Dorothy Day*

And then a quote that really made me think:

"I really only love God as much as I love the person, I love the least."

—*Dorothy Day*

>Anchorite and Coenobite Monastics

Ascetics in the 4th Century fell into two categories: Anchorites and Coenobites. An **anchorite** was someone who lived a solitary life. Anchorites withdrew from the world, all the noise and distraction, and even the organized Church, to be alone with Christ. **Coenobites** were ascetics who gathered in communities to live holy, set-apart lives from the rest of the world. The Coenobites' day was one of manual labor (agriculture, cooking, or copying Scripture), prayer, and recitation of Psalms and other Scripture. They would meet for a communal meal in the evening and for prayer three times a day. Monastic communities in the Middle Ages would become centers for education and missionary sending. These Coenobitic monastic communities continued throughout the history of the Church and are still present today. We know the female Coenobites today as **nuns** and the male Coenobites as **monks**. The daily programs for nuns and monks today are pretty much the same as the daily programs of the 4th Century ascetic Coenobites.

>The most famous Catholic nun of the last 100 years must be Mother Theresa of Calcutta (1910- 1997). She was a shining example of someone who gave up all the comforts of life to serve God and the poor in Calcutta, India. Mother Teresa was invited to the National Prayer Breakfast at the White House in 1994. This was a time where abortion was a hot topic in American culture. From the 1970s up until last year, abortion was considered a constitutional right of every woman. At the 1994 Prayer Breakfast, the president of the United States, senators, government representatives, and other "important" people were in attendance. Mother Theresa, who was 83 years old at the time, stood up and spoke to all in attendance. She said:

"I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child. Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching the people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. That is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion."⁵

>Augustine of Hippo

⁵ <https://www.daines.senate.gov> , Dobbs/Lead Floor Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast in 1994. 05.10.22
Pro Life Floor Remarks.pdf

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The most influential theologian in the history of the Western Church was/is Augustine of Hippo (354- 430 AD).⁶ Augustine was born in north Africa. His father a Pagan, colonial Roman soldier, and his mother was a Christian who was a native of north Africa. Augustine was baptized by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan when he was 33 years of age.

Augustine had many theological contributions but we will only have time to mention a few here. Augustine developed and made popular the Western Trinitarian view of the Spirit proceeding from the Father **and the Son**. We may remember Eastern theology affirmed that the Spirit only proceeded from the Father. This debate between the East and West was one of the issues that eventually led to the split in the 11th Century. For Augustine, the Spirit was the “bond of love” between the Father and the Son.

Augustine also developed the understanding of salvation by grace. This understanding came out of the debate with Pelagius, and later gave Martin Luther the inspiration for the Reformation doctrine of *Sola Gratia*—“Grace Alone.” For those of us who did not know, Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk. That means he studied the theology of Augustine of Hippo. As you read some weeks ago, Augustine developed one of the earliest doctrines of Ecclesiology when he debated the Donatists.

I think we may still remember the issue that arose with the Donatists. The Church in north Africa experienced intense persecution and the Romans forced some Church leaders to apostatize and hand over Scriptures to be burned. The Donatists decided that anyone who handed over Scripture or apostatized could not be allowed back into the Church, which included Church leaders. The Donatists then said anyone who receives sacraments from these apostatized leaders is not actually receiving a real sacrament (the sacraments were not actually valid). The Donatists went as far as saying no one with sin in their life should be a part of the Church. The Church was only meant for the “faithful few.” Augustine then declared that the Church’s holiness comes from Christ, not from the people within it. And, even if a sinful minister administers sacraments (Eucharist, baptism), they are valid because of Christ’s holiness. Augustine went on to use the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt 13:36- 43), and the parable of the fish in the net (Matt 13:47- 52), to explain how the Church is made up of both “sinners” and “saints.” We should not try to sort people out now, but let Christ do that at the resurrection. Augustine’s views became Ecclesiological doctrine that are still recognized by the Roman Catholic church and many Protestant churches today.

⁶ When I say “western Church” I am referring to the Church that had its center in Rome which later split into Catholic and Protestant. The “Eastern Church” had its center in Constantinople and later became known as the Eastern Orthodox Church.

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We also discussed a few weeks back whether Augustine's view that the Church is made of "sinner" and "saint" goes against Jesus' and Paul's instruction to expel unrepentant sinners from the congregation. I have been thinking about this issue a lot recently as our denomination had to expel one of our pastors because of ongoing sinful behavior. As I have tried to reconcile Augustine's view with the instructions of Jesus and Paul, I have come to the idea that the Church is made up of all kinds of people who have different levels of commitment to Christ. We as pastors should not question someone's salvation, or commitment to Christ, but assume all our congregants, if they claim to be Christian, are actually Christians (we should not try to measure "how Christian" someone is). On the day of judgement, it will be now to Christ to decide who was actually committed to him and who was not. Then regarding sending people out of the Church, if the sin of someone comes to light, the issue needs to be addressed. And after the person is confronted with their sin, and refuses to repent and change, then that is the time where they can be expelled. When we are made aware of sin, it needs to be dealt with, but we do not go looking for sin. Searching for sin in people's lives is known in America as a "witch hunt."

>What about the issue between Augustine and Pelagius? Pelagius was an ascetic monk who lived in Rome. We should remember from above that **asceticism** is a lifestyle where a person practices severe self-discipline and avoids all forms of indulgence and pleasure. Pelagius was annoyed at the relaxed moral behavior of the Church in Rome, and he argued that Christians have a moral responsibility regarding their salvation. He said Christians must be constantly working, to improve themselves. Pelagius believed that by strict obedience to the OT Law and by following the moral example of Christ, salvation would be granted by God as a reward for their hard work.

Augustine responded to Pelagius's ideas by saying salvation can never be earned, it is a free gift of Grace. Augustine then said, since Adam sinned, human nature has been completely corrupted and humans, on their own, cannot choose to do the right thing. This corrupted human nature has been passed to every person of the human race and this sinful nature will not allow people to freely choose God. Augustine went on to say that sin is like a sickness that we can never recover from. The only antidote is the gracious gift of salvation, and that salvation cannot be earned, but only accepted. Through his various arguments against Pelagius, Augustine formalized the doctrine of Original Sin and gave the foundation for John Calvin's doctrine of Total Depravity. Pelagius and his views were officially condemned at the council of Carthage in 418.

>The last contribution from Augustine I would like to mention is his book *City of God*. *City of God* tells a story of two cities: God's city and the city of the world. In his book Augustine lays out principles of how he believed the Church and State (worldly

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governments) should interact. One of the longest lasting contributions of City of God was/is Augustine's explanation of how the Church should relate to war. Augustine created what is called the "Just War Theory," and it is still the official position of the Roman Catholic Church today. Just War Theory says that the Church can support war, and support Christians fighting in that war if it meets certain requirements.

1. **War must be declared openly by legitimate authority** (rebels or unrecognized groups cannot declare war).
2. **War must have a just cause** (defense of the common good).
3. **Warring state must have just intentions** (not self-interest)
4. **Aim of war must be the establishment of a just peace** (the end should not result in an unfair balance. No one should be oppressed).

While all these points sound great, there has never been a war in history that has met these qualifications. That is why it is called the Just War Theory. From the 5th Century to now it has only existed in theory and has not been practically realized.

Questions:

1. What do we think about Augustin's Just War Theory?
2. What are our thoughts about the Church or Christians fighting in, or supporting war?

>Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon

Some of the big ecumenical councils in the history of the church: Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431, Chalcedon 451. We talked a bit about Nicaea and Constantinople a few weeks back when we were looking at the Nicene Creed. I forgot to show you my favorite icon from the Council of Nicaea. >This icon shows St. Nicholas (yes, the same St. Nicholas who was made into "Santa Clause") slapping Arius because he is so offended by the heresy. We will look briefly here at what happened at the Council of Ephesus, as well as Chalcedon, because the Statement of Chalcedon, is authoritative in the Church today regarding the two natures of Christ.

>Ephesus 431

There was a Christian theologian from the Western Church by the name of Nestorius. He said that Mary **should not** be called "bearer of God"- *Theotokos*, but "bearer of Christ" *Christotokos*. *To simplify his question, he wanted to know if Mary was the mother of God or just Christ.* Nestorius said Jesus's human nature and body were born of Mary, but not his divine nature. He said Jesus' divine nature came later. Nestorius believed that if we read the Gospels critically, we could clearly see the division between Jesus's divine nature and his human nature. As an example: Nestorius

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said, when Jesus ate and slept, his human nature was operating, but when he healed the sick or changed the water to wine, his divine nature was operating.

The Eastern Church heard of Nestorius's views and called together an ecumenical council in Ephesus to decide if his views were right or wrong. But as the time came to begin the council, Nestorius's supporters were delayed in their travels, so the Eastern bishops saw this as their opportunity. They condemned Nestorius in 431 under the leadership of bishop Cyril.

Well, a few days later Nestorius's supporters arrived, found out what had happened, they convened their own council, and condemned bishop Cyril as a heretic. Both sides then continued to retaliate against each other until Emperor Theodosius of Constantinople intervened. After a complete council was convened (West and East), and both sides shared their views, the council found Nestorius to be a heretic in 433 at Ephesus and had him exiled out of the empire.

What exactly was the issue here? They were not arguing for the status of Mary, but they were arguing for the status of Jesus. Was Jesus actually God or not? The council concluded that Mary could be called *theotokos*—Mother of God—because Jesus was God, beginning from the time of his conception. They also concluded that we cannot tell the difference between Jesus' human and divine natures. When he healed, both his human and divine nature healed. When he slept, both his human and divine natures slept. His natures were perfectly united in the person of Jesus. Martin Luther built on this idea with the theological explanation of the ***“Communication of Attributes.”*** If the Divine nature and human nature were united in Christ, you could not say his human nature was hungry but his divine nature healed people. You could not say his divine nature spoke on behalf of God but his human nature was crucified. The conclusion of Ephesus 431, and the idea later developed by Martin Luther was that, because the two natures are together, “Whatever Jesus' divine nature did, his human nature did. Whatever his human nature did, his divine nature did.” That means in the person of Jesus, God spent time with prostitutes and tax collectors. In Jesus, God lived an impoverished life for the purpose of identifying with us and saving us. In the person of Jesus, God gave himself to be tortured and crucified on our behalf. Martin Luther takes this understanding to a shocking end, ***“Jesus was crucified. Jesus Christ is God. Therefore, God suffered and died.”***

>Chalcedon 451

The Council of Chalcedon was called to address the claims of Eutyches. Eutyches said Jesus was one substance with the Father but not with us (this is similar to Docetism). The sister of Emperor Theodosius, Pulcheria, called together the 4th ecumenical council at Chalcedon in 451 where Eutyches was eventually condemned. The council created what is known as the “Definition of Faith,” or the “Symbol of Chalcedon.” It is not a creed that is meant to be recited, but an explanation of the nature

of Christ. The definition is very wordy and a bit complicated. I have included it here as it is the understanding of most denominations today.

“We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same ***perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood***; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, ***the Mother of God***, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in ***two natures; inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons***, but one and the Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.”⁷

Churches that affirm this understanding of Christ's nature are known as Chalcedonian Churches. The Roman Catholic Church affirmed this definition and the Eastern churches that affirmed the definition became officially known as the Orthodox Church (The Eastern Church is still known as the Orthodox Church today). Most Christian denominations today would be considered Chalcedonian. However, not all the Eastern Churches agreed, or still agree, with the Symbol of Chalcedon. They are known as Monophysite Christians—Monophysite meaning “one nature.” That simply means the two natures—divine and human—merged into one united nature at the Incarnation. The two natures then, were not able to be separated.

>The Fall of Rome and the Rise of Constantinople

The 5th Century saw the collapse of the Roman Empire. Various people groups attacked and invaded which eventually led to the fall of the Roman government. A group of people called the Vandals entered the empire in 407, fought their way through France and Spain, made it past the Straights of Gibraltar in 429, and took Carthage in 439. They dominated north Africa and moved to the islands in the sea. In the year 455 they sacked Rome and caused much destruction to the city. As odd as it may sound, these

⁷ *The Symbol of Chalcedon*. Edited by Lang, David. Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms. Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, Inc., 2006.

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Vandals were Christians. If we can remember the issue of Arius and the Council of Nicaea in 325, after Arius and his followers were condemned, they were exiled from the Roman empire. But what the Nicene Catholic Church did not expect was Arius to be such an amazing evangelist. Arius spent decades traveling around the cities and towns outside the Roman empire, converting people to Arian Christianity. So, many of the people groups that attacked the empire were Arian Christians, and they did not like the Nicene Christians. The Arian Christians actually persecuted the Nicene believers.

The last of the Roman emperors to rule in Rome was Romulus in the year 476. After that time the emperors of the Christian empire ruled from the city of Constantinople. When Rome was overtaken by the Arian Ostrogoths in 476, the Nicene Christians asked for help from the Emperor Zeno of Constantinople, but the emperor did not send help as he saw this as his opportunity to claim power over the whole empire. Even though the country of Italy was under an oppressive, persecuting power they continued to elect popes which were the head of the Western Church. After Emperor Zeno died, Justinian became the new emperor in Constantinople. Justinian sent the first official missionaries to Nubia (Sudan) in 543AD, but we should know that Christianity began to take hold in Nubia in the mid-200s during the Decian persecution. Also, by the year 543, Christianity had been growing in Ethiopia for more than 200 years. ➤ Two Syrian brothers, Frumentius and Aedesius, were taken as slaves to the ancient Aksumite Empire of Ethiopia where they became tutors to the emperor's son. Through their positive influence and witnessing, the prince converted to Christianity and declared his empire to be Christian. Frumentius was later consecrated bishop of the Ethiopian church by Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria.

➤ France's Alliance with Rome

During the 400s France (Gaul) was ruled by two warring people groups, the Burgundians, who were Arian Christians, and the Franks, who were Pagans. Through the missionary efforts of Nicene believers, the Burgundians were converted to Nicene Christianity. The Pagan peoples and Nicene Christians intermarried, and many Pagans converted to Christianity, so much so that the Pagan Frankish king was baptized in the year 469. As we saw in Ethiopian history, once the emperor/king was baptized, many people followed. In 534 the two Christian kingdoms became one after the Franks defeated the Burgundians in battle.

Over the next 250 years, the kings of France gained more power over the Church to the point where the kings were eventually appointing all bishops in France. We may not be surprised to learn that the bishops were obedient to the kings, and the agenda of the king soon became the agenda of the Church. Again, we see the problem that arose in the time of Constantine. Church leaders are very unlikely to speak out against people

in power or the government when they are kept in power and paid by the government. The popes in Rome looked to the Christian Frankish kingdom for assistance as they felt they had been completely abandoned by the Emperors in Constantinople. This alliance between France and Rome reached its high point in the year 800 when the Pope crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (Western Empire). This should make us aware that the Pope was seen as the highest human authority on earth (in the Western Church). The Pope was the highest authority in spiritual matters (Church) and secular matters (society and government).

>The Papacy

We may ask, how did one person become seen as the authority over both the Church and governments? Well, it was a long road with a long story. I will try to do a brief summary of the Papacy (the office of Pope) and highlight a few of the positively noteworthy Popes, along with some of the problems within the Papacy.

The word pope means “father” and was first used to refer to respected and important bishops (not originally the head of the whole Church). There are early documents referring to “Pope Cyprian of Carthage” or “Pope Athanasius of Alexandria” (Cyprian and Athanasius were in the 300s). When the official office of Pope came to be, the term Pope referred only to the bishop of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church claims the Papacy in Rome began with Peter, the first bishop of Rome. We know from Church history that Peter lived in Rome, and he narrated the Gospel of Mark in Rome. He was also executed in Rome by the Roman Emperor Nero. **However**, there is no evidence that Peter was a bishop of Rome or that Rome was in any way the center of Christianity in the 1st Century. Antioch and Alexandria were the centers of Christianity in the 1st through the 3rd centuries. It was not until after Constantine converted, and began supporting the Church in Rome, that Rome became more of a center of Christianity. The Pope’s authority grew as the western empire fell apart. In the East, the Patriarch was the head of the Church, but he was under the authority of the Emperor of Constantinople. Because of that reality, the Eastern political agenda favored and partnered with the Church. In the west, the empire was divided, and Arians and Pagans took control. The Pope then became the authority over Christianity, as the guardian of the Catholic faith. Nicene, Catholic Christians united under that one head. To put it very simply, there was no strong government, so people looked to the Pope for leadership, inside and outside of the Church.

>Leo the Great

The first “actual Pope,” as we understand Pope today, was Leo the Great (Pope from 440- 461). Leo was a theologian who positively contributed to the understanding of Christ’s humanity and divinity. He spoke authoritatively in both the East and West regarding theological debates, and he unofficially took the role of governmental authority. Leo’s governmental authority was seen when Atilla the Hun invaded Italy. The

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Roman emperor was weak, and the government was not functioning properly. As the armies were about to attack Rome, Leo went out and met Atilla, and after some discussion, Atilla the Hun, and his army turned back and left. Leo was seen as the savior of Rome, and ***through this event Leo was seen to have authority over the Church and government.*** Leo knew that Jesus had made Peter the rock on which the church was built. He believed that Peter was the head of the Church of Rome. ***Therefore, the bishops of Rome should be the head of the whole Church.***

>Gregory the Great

Another noteworthy Pope was Gregory the Great (Pope from 590- 604). In the middle of the 500s, Rome was besieged by a group known as the Ostrogoths. The situation in Rome had become very terrible. Much of the city had been destroyed by previous wars, there was much sickness, and a lack of food and clean water. The Pope at the time, Pelagius, organized with a young deacon by the name of Gregory to sanitize the city, bury the dead, care for the sick and feed the hungry. In the process of this humanitarian work, Pope Pelagius died and the Church in Rome elected Gregory to replace him. Gregory then organized food distribution, he built up the cities' food stores, organized rebuilding projects, and he even went out and negotiated peace with their attackers. Gregory preached regularly and encouraged believers in their faith, and he did extensive theological writing. ***Again, we see a strong Pope acting with the authority of the Church and government.***

We should be aware that Gregory's legacy continues today in more than one area. Gregory saw the danger of married bishops passing on their bishoprics to their children, so he encouraged clerical celibacy. Simply, if clergy cannot have children, they cannot pass on Church leadership within their family. Church leaders must be appointed. Clerical celibacy is still required in the Catholic church today.

Gregory also introduced the practice of penance, and he developed the doctrine of purgatory. Gregory believed that salvation was a gift of Grace and that baptism washed away previous sins. But then he had the question, "What about sins committed after baptism?" Gregory decided that believers must offer satisfaction for sins committed after salvation and baptism. This satisfaction (penance) included: feeling bad, confession, and even self-inflicted physical punishment. This self-inflicted physical punishment continued throughout the Medieval Church as some people would beat themselves with whips after sinning (flagellation).

Gregory then continued with this idea of cleansing of sins after baptism and said even if we have offered penance for all our sins, we are still not holy enough to go straight to Christ after death. There must be a place of purification, to get rid of all sins not purified. This place is purgatory (fire purifies, so it is a place of fire). Gregory said all Christians must spend time in purgatory before going to heaven, and the amount of time depended on how many sins a person committed after baptism (you could be there for a day, a week, or a thousand years). Also, the living could assist those in purgatory by

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praying for them. Gregory would hold services for the dead where Christians would pray for their spirits so they could go to heaven faster. Penance is still required for the forgiveness of sins in the Catholic church, and the doctrine of purgatory is the official view.

One last comment about Gregory the Great. After the Roman Empire started to fall apart in the 400s, the Roman government removed its troops from England, which caused most Roman citizens to leave. England was then ruled by two Pagan groups of people, the Angles, and the Saxons. When Gregory became Pope in 590 he sent a missionary monk named Augustine to England, to convert the Pagans. His instructions to Augustine were simple. He said that when the people convert, only remove the cultural practices that are contrary to Christianity; leave everything else. He told Augustine, we do not want to make it difficult for the Pagans to convert. Also, do not destroy their temples, but simply destroy their idols. Sprinkle holy water on the temples and use them for churches. I believe this to be some of the wisest advice ever given to a missionary. Can we imagine what the cultures around the world would look like today if the white missionaries did not try to remove peoples' culture. Too many times, white missionaries believed European or American culture to be the same as "Christian culture."

>Questions:

1. How do we feel about penance? If we disagree with it, what do we say about sins after baptism?
2. How would you respond to the idea of purgatory?
3. Lastly, how can Gregory the Great's advice practically be applied in missions work today?

>Back to France

As we mentioned earlier, France and Rome became very close during the Medieval period. The high point in their relationship was when the Pope crowned Charlemagne emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. >The Emperor Charlemagne believed that an emperor (specifically himself) was given that position by God to put God's plans into action, to "Christianize" the world. So with that understanding, Charlemagne worked to reform the Church and to Christianize the whole of the old Roman empire again. He believed the main means of conversion (Christianizing) was **baptism**.

The common belief was that if a Pagan was baptized, their old gods would reject them and then they could only now turn to Christ. Therefore, baptizing Pagans and specifically baptizing infants, would ensure that everyone would be Christian.

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Charlemagne desired the world to be Christian, so he instituted a policy in the empire, and to all lands where they went, “Be baptized or die.” This belief of creating Christian nations by baptizing infants continued all the way through the Protestant Reformation and has continued with various denominations today. But we must ask ourselves, “*Does baptism make someone a follower of Christ?*” Or what about Charlemagne’s policy of **baptism or death**? *Is this really an appropriate means of evangelism?* **One or two people can share if they like.**

While many today look back and see Charlemagne as being a positive figure in history, his successors are not looked upon highly. When Charlemagne died his successors were not able to lead in the same way he did. So, to keep their power, many of the following emperors began using bribery and violence to keep their rule. But it was not only the emperors who were corrupted, but also the popes. Over the next 200 years, the Papacy changed many times. Many wanted the position of Pope, so they lied, cheated, made alliances, made promises, and stole to get into the office. Even some who wanted to be pope murdered the active pope. This fighting for power and office of the Pope led to coups and conspiracies. At one point there were three people claiming to be Pope, and each one had supporters and followers who claimed they were the rightful Pope. Finally, King Henry III of Germany (1017- 1056 AD) decided to intervene in the situation. He saw that the highest office of authority was corrupted, so someone needed to correct the situation. King Henry called together a Church council in the Western Empire and the Church council removed all three popes and elected Clement II to take over the Church of the West. Again, this story leads to another question, “*Do we think it was right for a governmental leader to intervene in the organization of the Church? Do we think this type of governmental action could be right today in certain situations?*” **Maybe one or two people can share if they like.**

>Papal Reform

Us Protestants tend to believe that the Catholic Church was corrupted from the beginning of the Papacy to the time of the Reformation. Many of us wrongly think that the Holy Spirit or Jesus had abandoned the Church for about 1,000 years until the “savior” Martin Luther arrived. But that is completely wrong thinking. The Church belongs to Christ, and Christ has never, and will never abandon it. Yes, there were many corrupt Church leaders throughout the history of the Church, *but that does not mean the Church itself was corrupted or had “fallen”*. The same goes for today. We know of pastors, bishops, or other Church leaders who abuse their power who abuse congregants, but they do not represent the whole Church. We should not forget this when we study history. Some leaders were corrupt and sinful, but I’m sure there were hundreds of thousands, or even millions of Christians that were actually devoted to Christ. But we do not read about them, just as we don’t read in the news about all the

devoted Christians today. We usually only read about the corrupt, evil, or crazy ones. I want to highlight three positive leaders at the beginning of the second millennium.⁸

>Bruno (Leo IX)

In 1048, after the death of Pope Clement II, three men: Bruno, Hildebrand, and Humbert traveled to Rome for the purpose of bringing positive change within the leadership of the Church. The three of them began the fight for reform by working to end the practice of simony. Simony is when a church leader, priest, bishop, etc., sold their position to the highest bidder, instead of passing their position to the person God and the Christian's chose. When the three men arrived in Rome, the Church voted Bruno to be the next Pope (He was given the name Leo IX). With the new Papal authority, Leo enforced clerical celibacy, and abolished simony. Why were the issues of celibacy and simony so important? **Simony**—if simony was allowed, only the rich could be leaders in the Church. **Celibacy**—if clergy were allowed to marry and have children, they would be more likely to pass on their position to their children. Celibacy would prevent this. If these two issues were not enforced—forced celibacy and banning of paying for Church office—then only a few rich families would be leading the Church. This issue of passing on Church positions to children is becoming more common within Protestant churches. We see why Catholics do not allow clergy to marry.

Another positive contribution Leo made was seen at the Second Lateran Council in 1058. Under the advice of Leo, the council created the position of Cardinal within the Church structure. Cardinals would be under the Pope and above bishops. The Cardinals, among other things, would be the ones to elect new popes. This practice continues today in the Roman Catholic Church.

>Hildebrand (Gregory VII)

After Leo died, his friend Hildebrand became Pope and his name was changed to Gregory VII. Gregory then appointed his friend Humbert to be his trusted advisor. Gregory continued to work to reform the Church with the purpose of uniting the Church into one flock. With good intentions Gregory ordered that the Bible should not be translated into any languages outside of Latin. He said Rome should be in charge of the ministry of teaching, preaching, and interpreting Scripture.

This is a tough one! I can understand why he made these decrees but the application caused lasting problems in the Church. He was worried that people would mistranslate the Bible when it was produced in other languages. That is a real concern, but to forbid it completely, I believe that to be a wrong application. Or, to say that Rome can be the only authority on teaching and interpreting; that is also a big problem. Again, I can see how he would be concerned about wrong interpretation and wrong teaching,

⁸ I will say, while they had positive contributions to the Church, they also unintentionally negatively affected it. But we cannot forget that they were human, like us. We also positively contribute, but at the same time, we contribute negatively, even if by accident.

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but to say that only he and his staff could be the only proper interpreters? This type of thinking continues to be common today in Global Theology. White North Americans and White Europeans tend to think that they have the proper understanding of biblical interpretation and Theology, and that people from the Majority World need to learn from them. This is not a correct understanding and is ethnocentric thinking. We need to get away from the thinking that Western thinking or Western theology is the best. The Catholic Church did not change its policies until the 1960s when the Second Vatican Council declared that Church worship services could be done in various languages, not only Latin.

While most Christians in the 11th Century were happy with Leo's and Gregory's reforms, they actually led to the official split between the Western Church (centered in Rome), and the Eastern Church (centered in Constantinople). Both Leo and Gregory forbid clergy from marrying when they issued a "universal decree" enforcing celibacy. This universal decree was meant for the Church all over the world. However, the Eastern Church did not believe the Pope had authority over them. After this universal decree from the Western leader (the Pope), a Bulgarian Archbishop, who was the Patriarch of the Eastern Church, accused the West of heresy. He claimed that the Pope only had authority over the Western Church, and that the Patriarch had authority over the Eastern Church. In response to this heresy claim, Pope Leo sent his friend Humbert to Constantinople to smooth over the issue. Humbert was sent on a mission of peace and reconciliation. >But, instead of Humbert smoothing over the issue on behalf of Pope Leo, he went into the cathedral of Hagia Sophia (largest church in Constantinople), in the middle of a communion service, and he called the Patriarch a heretic and excommunicated him on behalf of the Pope. In reaction to Humbert's declaration, the Patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated the Pope. There were many issues leading up to the schism (split) between the East and West, but since that day in the year 1054, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church have not been reunited.

>Iconoclasts and Iconodules

Before we finish our class today, I want to talk about the use of icons in worship. Many of us may ask, "What are icons? Are they the same as idols?" Many of us Pentecostals misunderstand the purpose and use of icons. In the 700s, a debate arose about the use or presence of icons in churches (Icons would be paintings, statues, ect.). Emperor Leo III (717- 742) thought people might be tempted to worship the icons so he destroyed a well-known statue of Jesus. Leo believed icons would stop Muslims and Jews from converting (both Jews and Muslims are forbidden from making images). Leo's son, Constantine V called a council that banned the use of images in worship and churches and condemned those who would defend them. Destroyers of icons became known as Iconoclasts, and those who used icons in worship became known as Iconodules, literally translated: *worshiper of images*. Did the Christians who used icons actually worship them? Probably not, but that name was given to them by their

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opponents. After many years of debate, the 7th Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, in 787, decided that proper worship is only meant for God, but worshipful veneration (great respect and reverence) can be given to images. In short, images are not to be worshiped but can be used to help the imagination and to remember those saints who came before us.

Question: Do we have any experience with icons? What are our feelings of having pictures or statues of Jesus, Mary, apostles or saints in our churches?