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## **The Age of Monasticism - 300-600 AD**

### **Imperial Shepherds - Impoverished Sheep**

In 305, Diocletian stepped down from the Roman throne hoping to avoid civil war by substituting an intricate plan of decentralization for an imperial throne. He failed. By 310 there were six men vying for the throne and civil war was imminent. Diocletian's general, Constantius, had died and his troops were backing the general's son, Constantine, for the throne. Galerius was out of town and too distant to oppose Constantine so he reluctantly recognized Constantine as emperor too. Maximian's son, Maxentius, thought if Constantine could do it as a general's son, then so could he. He declared himself emperor, entrenched himself in Rome, and defied Constantine to take the city. Constantine was up to the challenge.

Constantine's army invaded Italy from Gaul (France). Though a worshipper of Helios, the sun god, Constantine had a miraculous conversion to Christianity on the afternoon before his battle with Maxentius. He saw a flaming cross in the sky with the words "in this sign conquer." Early the next morning he dreamed he heard a voice telling him to have his soldiers mark their shields with the letter "X" with a line drawn through it and the symbol of Christ curled around the top. Maxentius, for some unknown reason, left the security of Rome to meet Constantine on the Mulvian Bridge across the Tiber river. He was defeated there and drowned in the Tiber. Thus, Constantine became the undisputed emperor of the West in 312 AD

Constantine's conversion was not as sudden as it might seem. Constantine was devoted to his mother Helena, who became a Christian after her divorce from Constantius. Constantine had personally seen the failure of three separate persecutions during his lifetime and was undoubtedly persuaded that they would not be suppressed. He was also impressed with the order and morality of Christian conduct. And in spite of severe oppression and cruelty, Christians had seldom revolted against Rome and even taught their followers submission to civil powers and the divine origins of authority. All of these were venerable traits for the Roman citizenry to emulate, and for the emperor to encourage.

In 321 Constantine made the first day of the week a holiday and called it "the venerable day of the Sun" (Sunday). He may have identified the sun god Helios with the Christian God in some way, or perhaps he was simply translating the symbology of an old familiar faith to one lesser known. Certainly one of the Bible's most striking images is Jesus as the light of the world. We know that in 335 December 25th was the designated day to celebrate the birth of Christ, but whether it was to coordinate the holiday with the annual sun festival or to oppose it is a matter of

speculation. Christian records of the time refer to Christ as the "Sun of Righteousness" which he is indeed, and so we may assume that the substitution of Sun for Son in various phrases of the time is not a clear indicator that Roman paganism was somehow supplanting true Christian doctrine in the minds of the people. Such transliterations are common even today in many song lyrics. Constantine openly favored Christianity by:

1. Encouraging his subjects to become Christians.
2. Giving Christian Bishops the authority of judges in their dioceses.
3. Exempting church realty from taxation.
4. Giving money to needy congregations.
5. Building several churches (one in Constantinople).
6. Forbidding the worship of images in the new capital.
7. Revoking the Edict of Milan by which he pledged toleration and freedom for all religions - he revoked such protection for heretical sects and ordered the destruction of their meeting places.
8. He gave his sons a Christian education.
9. He financed his mother's Christian charities.
10. He ordered a church of the Holy Sepulcher be built over the alleged tomb of Christ in Jerusalem (still standing).
11. Helena (his mother) built a chapel over the traditional site of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem (still standing).

Even so, during his reign Constantine executed his son, his nephew and his second wife for reasons still unknown. That is why the sincerity of his Christian conversion remains an issue right to this day.

Constantine was troubled by theological issues which created divisions in his "new order." He therefore called bishops to be his political aides, he presided over their religious councils and he enforced their decisions, thus wedding church to state in its most fundamental sense.<sup>1</sup> Not only were divisions emerging in the church, but the constant wars against the tribes of Asia and Eastern Europe were creating security problems that led to a division of the Empire itself. As if sensing the inevitable degeneration of Rome, Constantine moved the seat of the empire to an old fortress city in present-day Turkey called "Byzantium" and renamed it "New Rome." Its popular name became Constantinople, the city of Constantine. In the course of time, it became the seat of an Eastern Empire and an Eastern Orthodoxy, and following the fall of Rome it stood as the center of Western civilization for the next thousand years.

It might be helpful at this point to say that the issue of what constituted heresy or apostasy on the part of an individual or of a church was really moot up to this point. There was no means of enforcement, no central agency to declare orthodoxy for all others. However, once Constantine established his authority in both spheres of influence, both secular and ecclesiastical, this limitation evaporated. It became possible to exercise discipline and authority over the church universal with all the power of the imperial throne behind it. Every little movement prompted by a whim of interpretation sought the emperor's ear to enforce its Scriptural view, and to incidentally enhance its prestige and influence. The days of encouragement, exhortation and

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<sup>1</sup> Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981), pp. 86-89.

rebuke by a loving elder were quietly replaced by the sound of soldier's boots and prison doors during the coming centuries.

While we're here, what do we mean by heresy? The dictionary definition is this: "an opinion or doctrine at variance with established religious beliefs, esp. dissension from or denial of Roman Catholic dogma by a professed believer or baptized church member." Apostasy, on the other hand is "an abandonment of one's religious faith..." and it describes someone who has lost his salvation, and not just the fellowship of other believers. We must determine, in the examination of various theological beliefs, whether they merely describe a break in the uniform interpretation of Scripture, or whether the avowed interpretation is so far from Truth that it constitutes a disavowal of Christian teaching altogether. Disagreement between two believers or between two schools of thought doesn't necessarily mean apostasy on the part of one or the other, and rejection of mainline teaching, while heretical, doesn't necessarily mean apostasy either.

### *Intra-Church Rivalries: Issues of Control*

**The three biggest issues creating theological divisions in Constantine's time were these:**

#### **DONATIST SCHISM**

To repeat our discussion of Donatism, the rigorists who hadn't backed down during Diocletian's persecution refused to accept a "traditore" or "hand-over of the Scriptures" as the consecrator of the new bishop of Carthage. Rather than submit to his rule, the Donatists appointed their own bishop which resulted in the development of a dual church system complete with Popes and counter-Popes (or anti-Popes), bishops and counter-bishops. But the Donatists were too strong to simply banish or declare as heretics. Constantine accommodated them in the various councils which he called.

#### **ARIANISM**

The Arian controversy lasted from the time of Constantine in 318 until 451 when the Council of Chalcedon finally put it to rest. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, denied the true divinity of Jesus Christ. He taught that the Son was not eternal but was created by the Father, and therefore the Son was not God by nature. He had a changeable nature. His honor and dignity were earned from the Father by Jesus' righteous life on earth rather than being inherent in Jesus' identity as God. Jesus was not "consubstantial" with the Father (i.e. of the same substance). The Holy Spirit was begotten by the Logos (Christ) and therefore was less than either the Son or the Father.

Arius' bishop, Alexander, condemned Arius' teachings and defrocked him and his followers. However, Arius had many sympathizers throughout the empire and a major conflict arose.<sup>2</sup> Eusebius writes the dispute was so intense that "the Christian religion afforded a subject of profane merriment to the pagans, even in their theaters." Constantine was upset with both Alexander and Arius. He wrote each of them and said, "There was no need to make these questions public ... since they are problems that idleness alone raises, and whose only use is to sharpen men's wits ... these are silly actions worthy of inexperienced children, and not of priests or reasonable men." Constantine called for the first ecumenical council of the church to resolve

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 92

the dispute. It met at Nicea in 325. The bishops who met there debated the nature of the person of Jesus Christ for over two months. Arius was opposed in the debate by the archdeacon Athanasius from Alexandria. Arius lost. The Nicene creed reference to the nature of the person of Jesus Christ reads "being one essence (homo-ousios) with the Father." Arius and his followers were banished from the empire.

Although settled in theory, Constantine wavered on the issue (his sister was an Arian) and he permitted some of the bishops to return from exile in 328. They immediately began a series of political maneuverings that led to the exile of Athanasius in 335, then bishop of Alexandria. Arius was declared orthodox and was scheduled for reinstatement in the church when he died in 336. The conflict continued for the next 150 years.

## MONASTICISM

As Christianity became more and more the haven of the general population, its standards became more and more subdued. God's people became displaced by the teeming masses. Two competing philosophies arose that were the stimulants to one of the most influential movements of all time:

**a. antinomianism** (at the far left) taught that the Christian was above the law and beyond mere morality, and could therefore do as he pleased. "Once saved, always saved" was corrupted into "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we live."

**b. rigorists** (at the far right) taught with Puritanical fervor, that the perfection of the person and the soul is an attainable goal in this lifetime, and in some versions of their teaching, a goal that could be surpassed. Mere salvation wasn't enough.

Somewhere between these two extremes came a group of Christian purists who, frustrated by the lack of commitment in the church body, decided to seclude themselves in trial communities called monasteries to work out a formula for Christian living. It quickly degenerated into an escapist retreat on the one hand, and an elitist club on the other. If martyrdom was no longer the mark of someone who had made it, then perhaps a monk's habit and hairdo might be an appropriate alternative, a mark of distinction and apartness --- the sign of someone to be envied but not imitated.

Jeremy Jackson points out the underlying dangers of the "monastic solution" to Christian nominalism in these cautions:

1. People, being gregarious by nature, tend to gather together in flocks. Flocks, by identifying themselves distinctly from all other flocks, also tend to exclude all others. They are inherently alienating.

2. A flock tends to feather its own nest, cater to the internal needs of its members, and thereby it tends to "become a service organization, gratifying human egos, human mores, human traditions. The Gospel is adapted to society, instead of society being adapted to the Gospel."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> . Jackson, Jeremy C. No Other Foundation (Cornerstone, Westchester, Ill., 1981), p. 64.

3. "Anyone who takes Jesus' words seriously is thought to be either a fanatic, whose conduct is vaguely threatening, or a super-saint, whose example is not for the likes of us." We'll look at a few examples of these "intense" personalities shortly.

Why is this dual-track existence of the church so inescapable? Why does the church compromise so readily and follow secular fads so easily? "Just as the secular mind prefers to push Christ aside and talk about Paul or Augustine or Luther, so the ecclesiastical mind, the mind absorbed in the church as a mere institution, is more taken with the thoughts and deeds of churchmen than with the Word of the Founder of the Church.

This is because the only alternative to accepting the supernaturally revealed standard... of the church... is to accept as a normative standard... the actual state of the church at any one point in time.<sup>4</sup>

We wind up determining who Jesus is, or how "successful" his teachings are by looking at his followers. This is why we established the tools of our historical investigation using a Biblical standard against which to judge history, and why we must refuse to accept history as the standard against which to judge the Scriptures. But for all the mistakes that have been made by the church in the past 2000 years, there have been far many more successes. Standards of morality we take for granted today were foreign concepts to those in the 4th century, and change did not come about easily or quickly.

It is overly simplistic to characterize monastic life as either escapist or elitist. It was in the monasteries that the dark ages were held at bay. It was in the monasteries that we find the watchmen of God's kingdom fighting the good fight at the very gates of Hell. Monasteries were the preservers of learning, the keepers of the eternal flame, the translators and transcribers of the Scriptures, the expounders of the Truth of God. Monasteries were planted in the remotest corners of the earth as bastions of civilization and hope in a dying world. We find the sweet Spirit of God changing individual lives and sanctifying society through their influence. It was by their influence that perhaps the church's greatest theologian of all, Augustine of Hippo, came to know Christ. Monasteries offered a visible demonstration of the life-renewing power of the Gospel. They were like the bronze snake lifted high above the people to inspire and encourage them, to remind them of God's grace and forgiveness, and to testify that the Kingdom of God is a mighty fortress, a secure refuge in times of trouble, and these were troubled times indeed.

The struggle of the Christian walk is an agonizing one. It is the runner in the race striving against time, pain and exhaustion to win the race --- but whether he wins or whether he loses, he strives for the prize with each agonizing kick. His willingness to sacrifice himself to the needs of the task are evidenced moment by moment as he pushes himself past his own endurance barriers into that blissful state of total commitment and dedication. That description belies both the antinomian and the rigorist views of the Christian life. But what drove so many into the monasteries might be described as a shortening of the race course, and a waving of the time limit in the church at large. They withdrew to a place where there were still expectations to be met.

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<sup>4</sup> Loc. Cit.

If the church was becoming secularized by its popularity and, in 381, by its "officiality" as the authorized religion of Rome (all others having been outlawed by Theodosius), it nonetheless had its own salty effects on society at large.

### **In the 1st five centuries of its existence, the church**

1. Established world-wide missions
2. Created its own literature
3. Developed a world-wide cohesive organization
4. Made its intellectual statements of belief, and
5. Determined its form of worship

All of these achievements have remained the standards for the church to this day.<sup>5</sup> The enormous ramifications which flow from impressing the Mind of Christ on society, are evidenced in the following behavioral and intellectual changes that took place in those early centuries:

1. Polytheism became monotheism.
2. Immorality became a private matter instead of public.
3. Gladiatorial contests were replaced by schools of learning.
4. Theater and music became ornate forms of worship instead of tawdry exhibitions on street corners.
4. Infanticide was supplanted by orphanages and hospitals.
5. Sexual practices became circumspect and ordered.
6. Slavery was gradually seen as an affront to God's law.
7. Charity became the norm of duty rather than the exception of patronage.
8. Marriage became the kingpin of property law and social standards of behavior.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Confessions of Faith***

These accomplishments are profound and they demonstrate the power which attends the display of Christ-likeness in the lives of humble followers of Christ. Yet the desire to follow Christ stimulates imitation and competition from the world. It was in this forge of competing forces that the church hammered out its statement of belief as a mark of distinction for the church, and a standard of truth for the world.

The earliest statement of Faith or Confession (or Rule of Life as it is sometimes referred to) is the following:

I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty; And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, Our Lord, And in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, the resurrection of the flesh.<sup>7</sup>

Toward the end of the 2nd century we find this version:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty; And in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, Our Lord, Who was born of the Holy Ghost, and the Virgin Mary, Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried; On the third day he rose from the dead, ascended in heaven, sat down at the right hand of the Father; From whence he will come to judge the living and the dead; And in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh.

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<sup>5</sup> Latourette, Kenneth *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* 5 vol. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 237-239

<sup>7</sup> Lohse, Bernhard *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Fortress, Phila., 1978), p. 33.

The original Eastern Trinitarian formula reads like this:

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, of whom everything is, And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, through whom everything is, And in the Holy Ghost.<sup>8</sup>

The Nicene Confession of 325 reads as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead; And in the Holy Spirit.

They went on to add a postscript:

But as for those who say, there was when He was not and, before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change --- these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

The Council at Chalcedon in 451 stated it this way:

... our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin; begotten from the Father before the ages as regards his Godhead, and in the last days, the same, because of us and because of our salvation, begotten from the Virgin Mary, the *theotokos*, as regards his manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature preserved and coalescing in one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis* - not parted or divided into two *prosopa*, but one and the same Son, only begotten, Divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets of old and Jesus Christ Himself have taught us about Him and the creed of our fathers has handed down.<sup>9</sup>

In these statements of faith we find a renunciation of Arian teachings and a rejection of the teachings of those who described Christ as less than or more than human in his sufferings on the cross, a rejection of Modalism, a rejection of polytheism in any form, a rejection of any teaching that Christ was less than God incarnate, a refutation that Christ did not die or rise from the dead, an affirmation of Christ's virgin birth, an affirmation of the second coming of Christ, of a Day of Judgment, and a declaration that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was an atoning sacrifice to pay for our sin. And the postscript to the Nicene Creed makes it abundantly clear that they considered such teachings to be apostate and not merely heretical.

### ***Biographical Sketches***

**Jerome** - Bible translator and advocate of monasticism. He was born to Christian parents in Dalmatia. He studied in Rome for 8 years and became a Christian at age nineteen, baptized by the Pope. He lived the life of a hermit in Aquilea near Rome. During a severe illness he had a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 34

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 52-53

vision of Christ who reproached him for his study of Greek and Latin. He went to a remote cave in the desert and employed a Jewish rabbi to help him learn Hebrew. In 382, Pope Damasus called Jerome to Rome to have a new translation of the Scriptures made from the original Hebrew and Greek. His work later became known as the Latin Vulgate, the officially recognized and authorized version for the Catholic church.<sup>10</sup>

**Augustine** - Born of a heathen father and Christian mother, Augustine was sent to Carthage to be educated. He fell in love with a girl there, had a son, but felt that sex was his defiling passion. After reading a work by Cicero, he was convinced intellectually that the pursuit of truth should be his life's ambition. He read the Bible but it seemed crude and barbarous to him. For a time he became a Manichean (Gnostic-like), and then he became a grammar teacher, and then a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage. At age 30, he separated from his long time mistress, became engaged to a young woman of wealth and position, but driven by his inner passions he never settled down. Then, in Milan, he came under the preaching of bishop Ambrose who taught him that the Christian life could be both eloquent and intelligent, and that the OT could be restated allegorically to avoid the troublesome conclusions that he had drawn on first reading.

The final stimulus to his conversion was the example of Anthony and the Egyptian hermits as they withstood the temptations of the world. In agony of spirit, he walked through his garden one day and heard the voice of child singing "take it and read it." He took hold of the new testament and came to Romans 13:13-14, "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." All doubt faded away, and on the eve of the following Easter 387, he was again baptized by Ambrose in Milan. He then lost in quick succession his mother and his son. In despair, he was eager to depart the world, but God had need of his services and he was called into the priesthood and made bishop of Hippo "against his will."<sup>11</sup>

**John of Antioch** (also called **Chrysostom** meaning "golden mouthed") - Well educated in rhetoric and law, he became a monk from 373 to 381. He was then ordained a deacon by Bishop Meletius of Antioch. In 386 he was appointed preaching elder there, and became the most popular and powerful of the Biblical expositors. He wrote many commentaries on Scripture, and became highly influential in his writings. In 398 John was called to be archbishop of Constantinople, but his outspoken opposition to the sexual shenanigans going on there offended the unscrupulous queen, Eudoxia. She persuaded Theophilus, the infamous bishop of Alexandria, to call a synod in 403 to silence and condemn John. False charges were brought and John was banished for life and died in exile.<sup>12</sup>

**Benedict** - Founder of the Benedictine Order. He adopted the most extreme form of asceticism and lived as a hermit in a cave. He spent three years there until called as abbot of a neighboring monastery. His strict discipline proved bothersome to the monks, however, and he narrowly escaped death by poison! He returned to his cave until hounded from there too. He left for Monte Cassino a much wiser man for the experience. He wrote his famous Rule of Faith and Life,

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<sup>10</sup> Moyer, Elgin S. *The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1981), p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> Shelley, Bruce *Church History in Plain Language* (Word, Inc., Waco, 1982) pp. 141-143.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Moyer, pp. 90-91.

taught, preached and lived a pattern of monastic piety. His "Rule" was designed to address the issue of unworthiness in prior monastic orders. He felt that discipline was at the heart of the issue, and yet, based on past experience, he knew that it must not be too heavy a yoke for ordinary men. He viewed the monastery as a spiritual garrison for Christ in a hostile world. None would be permitted to enter the order without undergoing a one year trial period. Authority was exercised by the abbot and all agreed to submit to that authority. On the other hand, the abbot could decide major matters only after consulting with the whole body.

To avoid contamination from the external world, the monastery was to be as self-sufficient as possible, and, to avoid the evil of idleness, each brother was to be occupied at fixed times in manual labor, and at other fixed times in religious reading. Worship was observed 7 times in each 24 hour period for approximately 20 minutes each. Because of the extensive reading required, each monastery came equipped with a library. It was not long before the monks were copying and reading the classical works of Greece and Rome thus preserving them for future generations.

**Justinian** - Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire 527-565. His long reign was the most brilliant in the history of the Byzantine empire. He carried on almost constant war against the pagans, both within and without the empire. In 529 he closed the ancient pagan philosophical school of Athens. He built Saint Sophia, the cathedral church at Constantinople. He was an adherent of the orthodox faith and called the 5th Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 which dealt with the Monophysite problem. The monophysites taught that Christ had a single nature, or at least his human nature was so well absorbed by his divine nature that it was not distinguishable. This worried the orthodox church which felt that such a statement challenged the whole concept of redemption. If Christ was not fully human, then no sacrifice had been made.

Justinian wrote his famous "Institutes" (not to be confused with Calvin's "Institutes") which regulated not only political affairs, but also ethical and ecclesiastical affairs. He gathered under one cover the Corpus Juris Civilis or Civil Law of Rome. He persecuted and punished not only the pagans, but also the Manichaeans, Arians, and other heretics, with his wrath falling most heavily on the Montanists. He condemned Origen openly for his doctrines and helped accelerate the church-state relationship, with the church taking second position to the state.

### *The Church As State*

#### **"The Strongman Syndrome" 400-600**

When the force of Visigoths led by Alaric took and sacked Rome in 410, and when in 430 (as Augustine lay dying in Hippo) the Vandals besieged the city, it was just the beginning of 600 years of barbarian invasions. Odoacer of the Ostrogoths dethroned the last of the western emperors in 476 and brought with him the Arian persuasion of Christianity passed on to the Ostrogoths by the great missionary Ulfilas. The conflict between the Arian and Catholic camps colored much of this period as the church strove to speak with a single unified voice. A succession and variety of barbarian kingdoms came to power in the wake of Rome's fall, each bringing with it its own unique contribution to church history, art and practice:

- **The Visigoths in Spain** (415-711) Introduced artistic techniques, motifs and designs
- **The Ostrogoths in Italy** (493-554) Brought classical and Byzantine art
- **The Burgundians in S.E. Gaul** (400-1033) The 1st barbarians to give up Arianism for Catholicism
- **The Vandals in N. Africa** (429-533) Closed the brothels of "Christian" Carthage
- **The Franks under the Merovingians** (486-752) Established a system of equity law that became the foundation for ecclesiastical jurisprudence The Lombards in N. Italy (568-774) Elected a king advised by nobles with a legislature and the source of Romanesque architecture
- **The Jutes, Angles and Saxons in Britain** (443-485) Provided missionaries for N.W. Europe & Scandinavia.<sup>13</sup>

These 200 years flesh out the actual beginning of Papal power in the church. We can see much of it in the life of Ambrose; then at the end of this period we continue to see Papal power expand during Gregory The Great's reign as both Pope and mini-emperor of the west.

**Ambrose** (340-397) - Bishop of Milan 374-397. Born in Gaul, the son of a high-ranking Roman who was prefect of one of the four great prefectures of the empire encompassing Gaul, Britain and Spain. His father died early and the family returned to Rome where Ambrose was educated for the law. Ambrose became civil governor of the territory headquartered at Milan, and then became Admirable Magistrate.

When the Arian Bishop of Milan died, strife between the Arians and the Catholics erupted and Ambrose, in his role as consular authority, went to the church to maintain order. When someone cried out, "Ambrose for Bishop!" the crowd took up the shout and Ambrose reluctantly accepted. The problem was this: Ambrose was only a catechist, not baptized. After his "election" he was quickly baptized, passed through the intermediary offices and – 8 days later – consecrated Bishop of Milan. He was deeply religious and humble and recognized his lack of training. He went straight to work studying the Bible, Greek theologians and preachers. He learned and taught at the same time, orthodox in his doctrine, a gifted orator and preacher, a firm disciplinarian, and greatly loved.<sup>14</sup>

By 380 Christianity was the official religion of Rome. The Emperor Theodosius published an imperial command:

“It is our will that all the peoples we rule shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans. We shall believe in the single Deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity.

“We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom we adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of our own initiative, which We shall assume in accordance with divine judgment.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Cairns, pp. 126-131.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Moyer, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Shelley, p. 111

Church construction reflected this attitude of imperial divinity and of the "transformation" of human imperfection into divine perfection for the saints in general. A Greek traveler in Persia describes a palace in which a chapel was "a hall covered with a dome; the inside was adorned with sapphires sparkling with a celestial blue brilliance, and standing out against the blue background of the stones were golden images of the gods, glittering like stars in the firmament." This style of mosaic-encrusted interior became the pattern for Byzantine churches, displaying at least God and the demigod who represented him on earth.

In 390 a Greek charioteer at Thessalonica was accused of homosexual practices and imprisoned by the governor. When the day of the races approached, the people rose up and demanded the charioteer's release. The governor refused. The mob murdered him and freed the prisoner. At the next race, Theodosius had the gates closed and guarded by a contingent of soldiers. At a signal they entered and exterminated the 7,000 attendees.

When Theodosius had the 7,000 at Thessalonica massacred, Ambrose refused to give him communion until he repented. Ambrose, in a courageous act, wrote Theodosius a letter of diplomatic rebuke:

"I cannot deny that you have a zeal for the faith, and that you fear God, but you have a naturally passionate spirit which becomes ungovernable when you are excited. I call on you to repent. You can only atone for your sin by tears, by penitence, by humbling your soul before God. You are a man, and as you have sinned as a man, so you must repent. No angel, no archangel can forgive you. God alone can forgive you, and He forgives only those who repent."<sup>16</sup>

The weapon Ambrose forged and which would be taken up again and again by the western papal throne, was the threat of excommunication, a weapon never used at Constantinople. The split between east and west was more than geographic. Bamber Gascoigne refers to the two approaches as "Greek Catholic and Roman Orthodox" because while the Greek Orthodox Church might have been more universal at the time, it was the Roman Catholic Church which was more correct in its practices.

Ambrose left more than a strong papacy behind him: one of his greatest legacies was that Augustine of Hippo was converted by his powerful preaching. Ambrose also left behind many literary works, and he not only wrote many hymns but he created a style of hymn called Ambrosian Chant. Ambrose reintroduced congregational singing into the churches and he maintained peace (if not harmony) between the Arians and the newly-named Catholics. He set a tone for the Roman Papacy that was to last until the Reformation, a seat of secular as well as spiritual dominance.

### **The First Warrior Pope**

**Gregory The Great** (540-604) - Pope from 590-604. Gregory was born to an old senatorial family of Rome, educated for government service and indeed held the highest civil office in Rome as its Prefect or Governor at age 33. After his father's death in 575 (when Gregory inherited his father's wealth) he quit his government post, turned the family estate into a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Shelley, p. 112

monastery and became a monk. He built six other monasteries in Sicily but lived in such strict abstinence and austerity that he undermined his health.

Gregory was chosen as one of the seven cardinal deacons of Rome, then Ambassador of the Pope to the imperial court at Constantinople from 578 to 585. When he returned to Rome he was made Abbot of his own monastery. In 590, when the black plague killed Pope Pelagius II, Gregory was unanimously elected by the senate, the clergy and the people to be Bishop or Pope of Rome. He refused the office, fled the city and hid in the forest. He was found and dragged back to Rome, where he finally submitted to his calling. He humbled himself and the people for three days, and legend notes the coincidence that the plague soon subsided.<sup>17</sup>

There was no emperor in the west and Gregory became its strong man. When the Lombards laid siege to Rome, he raised an army and defeated the "Arian" Lombards and then made peace with them. He held vast estates in Rome (called the Patrimony of Peter), Sicily, Italy, Southern France and North Africa. He used his vast power and wealth to strengthen the position of the western church, but also to provide for the needs of its people in a system of welfare.

Gregory glorified the past and held tradition on a par with the Scriptures. He interpreted the Bible allegorically, as in his text on Job called "Moralia." He promoted the doctrines and practices of good works and penance, of purgatory, the veneration of relics, mass and transubstantiation, the celibacy of the clergy, liturgy in worship, the traditional historic episcopacy, and the importance of missions. He sent Augustine of Canterbury to England and made him the first Roman Catholic Archbishop in the British Isles.<sup>18</sup>

Yet despite the power Gregory wielded, he was not a proud man. He opposed openly and vehemently the claims of John IV, then Patriarch of Constantinople, to the title of "Universal Bishop." It was an honorary title bestowed on patriarchs by the emperors Leo and Justinian, and confirmed by synod in 588. Even so, Gregory characterized the title as "foolish, proud, profane, wicked, pestiferous, blasphemous, and diabolical usurpation."<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Gregory referred to himself as "the servant of the servants of God." To Gregory, as it was to Augustine, pride is a vicious hound that dogs us relentlessly, that "raises itself up against all the members of the soul, and as a universal death and disease corrupts the whole body."<sup>20</sup>

Gregory incorporated into church theology, not only the teachings of the early fathers which he passed on to the church of the middle ages, but also the superstitions and pagan beliefs of the common populace. Once formulated, this body of theology became orthodoxy for subsequent theologians and bishops. For example:

**Imputed Sin and Free Will** - Adam's fall only weakened our freedom of will. Therefore under grace we may win merit for ourselves by good works.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Shelley, p. 181

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Moyer, pp. 168-169

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Shelley, p. 185

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 186

**Repentance** - For sins committed after baptism the process of forgiveness involves remorse, confession and then meritorious works. The greater the sin, the greater the need for penitence, or paying back. Whether it is enough remains a mystery till death.

**Intercession of the Saints** - Because the effectiveness of our penance is unknown, we may appeal to past saints for intercession on our behalf with Christ. Gregory did not originate this belief, but he did ratify it.

**Holy Relics** - Saints' and Martyrs' locks of hair, finger nails, toes, garments etc. were believed to have great power especially for defense against evil.

**Purgatory** - A middle ground to finish sanctification after death if full penance had not been made in this life.

**Eucharist** - The bread and wine were "transubstantiated" or transmuted into the actual blood and flesh of Christ. The meal was seen as a sacrifice offered by the priest for the sins of men --- not the same as Christ's sacrifice for all his people --- but for the post-baptismal sins of its participants, or for those who had already departed and were in purgatory (it provided an early release).

In all of these things we see a passion to "do" for God for self, and for others. It is a compulsion to gain worth, and accrue merit --- to become deserving of God's great gift. And it seems that all of this is a consequence of guilt rather than thankfulness for freedom from God's wrath. Such misperceptions of God's grace would color church theology for the next 1,000 years.